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COMICS INTERVIEW

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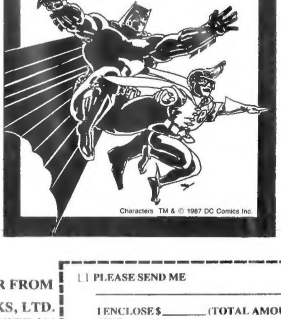

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UP FRONT

Gone on vacation!

-David

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"A hero is not permitted certain flaws, like being a racist."

ROY THOMAS

Cover-detail from AVENGERS #97, the climax to the Kree/Skrull Wars (art: Gil Kane & Bill Everett).

Life is not perfect, sometimes batteries die, sometimes things get misplaced, sometimes overworked tape players get hungry and chow down on whatever's in their greedy maws. So when Lou Mougin and Roy Thomas got together for a massive interview session which filled several tapes, what happened to the last tape of the bunch was "just one of those things."

Lou and Roy got back together recently, to redo the conclusion of that all-inclusive definitive Roy Thomas interview, but rather than merely rehash what had gone before, they decided to also talk about how things stand past, present and future . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *How stands the Golden Age at this moment?*

ROY THOMAS: What do you mean?

LOU: *How is the Golden Age keeping alive in an era that's 20 years beyond the Silver Age?*

ROY: Well, it's more like 30 beyond the beginning of it. Anyway, at this stage, there's probably less interest because it's now longer since what's commonly called the Silver Age — if you want to use that term — from the revival of Flash and Green Lantern and their getting their

All artwork accompanying this interview is ® 1989 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

"I don't remember any real consciousness

own books through FANTASTIC FOUR #1 and that whole period. When those things were started it was only about ten years or so since the end of the Golden Age, or at least the end of the publication of most of the superheroes in the late '40s. Actually, at that time it was closer to the creation of Superman than we are now to the creation of the Silver Age Flash! So because there's been so much history from the late '50s on, the primary interest is in *that* rather than in revivals of old characters from the '40s. We've got revivals of the X-Men and the Teen Titans from the '60s, basically revivals of Silver Age titles, which are now the hot items. There's even the revival of the Punisher, recently — who was a minor little character from the '70s — plus all of the ongoing things.

LOU: *And currently there's the revival of the New Gods and all that.*

ROY: Right. There are still some thousands of people who *are* interested in the Golden Age. The thing is to get the right combination to reach those people — assuming anybody at the companies really cares to do anything except maximize profits —

LOU: *Let's keep some of that history alive.*

ROY: — and there's no reason in particular why they should. However, the fact remains that there *is* something of an audience for it, it just depends on how they're done. There's very little interest in history among young people — there never was, really, particularly in this country. Young people are not interested in their own history or in very much of anybody else's. A very parochial kind of feeling, a very limited kind of feeling.

LOU: *One thing that really brought that home to me was when I took a look at the first issue of the new UNKNOWN SOLDIER from DC. I saw they had a footnote to explain that VC stood for the Vietcong.*

ROY: Right, that's just the thing, we're talking about some things that some of the readers, even the ones who are 20 years old or so, hardly know anything about firsthand — any more than I would know anything about World War II firsthand. The difference is that some people, including myself, are *interested* in history for its own sake. It's not because of some nostalgia or whatever, I really don't remember World War II. I remember the atomic bomb explosion being mentioned in the newspaper, and I remember other events that happened like in 1944 and '45, but I don't remember any real consciousness of the war. My father never got drafted or anything — supposedly, he tried to volunteer after Pearl Harbor and was turned down for flat feet and a bad back and things — so therefore, although I had a couple of relatives in the war, I didn't have even the thing that other people my age would have had, with their fathers off fighting the war. But the period makes for good comics, I think, assuming that you're interested in anything more than what's going on right now.

And everything that's going on right now becomes history almost immediately. People say it's hard to believe in a World War II menace because we know how it came out, but you *know* when you pick up most of these things that New York is not going to be destroyed. Maybe that will happen in one of the New Universe books or something, but if they did that in a book that's part of the main Marvel Universe or DC Universe then it would have to be dealt with in the other books. At Marvel, anyway — I don't know about DC, they're so fragmented now. You could probably destroy New York in one book and Superman and Batman wouldn't notice (laughter).

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Conan by Kenneth Smith.

LOU: *The thing in mainstream books is you have to keep as close as possible to the universe we experience for it to be recognizable.*

ROY: Yes, and that means it may be up to date *then*, but two or three months later it may be totally dated. It's very difficult doing period pieces, but historical novels are a valid artform and always have been. As long as that kind of thing *isn't* true for comics, as long as

of the war. My father never got drafted."

something *has* to be set in the present or the future, that just adds to the bastardization of comics as a sort of semi-legitimate or illegitimate artform. It all depends really on whether or not you like what's being done. Obviously, some people like the various books that I've tried to do at Marvel and DC over the years, enough that DC is now talking to me about doing another CRIMSON AVENGER series set in the late '30s, which is nice.

LOU: *That's good.*

ROY: And obviously, **Dave Stevens**, when he turns out those rare Rocketeer stories, despite the sexism of a lot of the—

LOU: *I'd say because of the sexism (laughter).*

ROY: Yeah, maybe because of it in a way — somehow in these enlightened days people still manage to buy this stuff because of the cheesecake in it, which strikes me as a little strange. But, of course, Dave does it so well (laughter). And there are a few other historical books from time to time. I'm doing a plot now for a Captain America Golden Age graphic novel which stands a fairly good chance of being accepted.

LOU: *Fantastic*

ROY: We'll see. And of course, THE SUB-MARINER is doing well enough at Marvel, despite the fact that it got off to a slow start. In terms of people *knowing* it was on sale, through changing editors and other things, there wasn't a single house ad for the book. Marvel advertises all of its things in house ads, but they didn't advertise SAGA OF THE SUB-MARINER. That hurt, but it sort of picked up gradually on its own, anyway.

LOU: *I had wondered about that, why it sort of came out with no fanfare or —*

ROY: It was because **Mike Higgins** had been the original editor, then it was **Terry Kavanagh**, and then **Mike Rockwitz**, and somewhere in all of that it ended up not getting a house ad, so when it went on sale nobody knew it. It needed a little bit of help, so we're trying to get one now for the second half, which is more the Marvel Age.

It took a while, I've heard from comics stores that sales picked up after two or three issues, when people got to know about it. But that's fighting against the odds and it's kind of a shame. You know, there is a certain market out there for these books, but you've got to be able to tap into it and let those people know. And in the case of the Sub-Mariner, at least, you've got a character that's been in THE AVENGERS recently, and that helped somewhat.

LOU: *Well, I know you've done a considerable amount of research, because I've looked through a lot of the original Bill Everett stories myself and I see that you're mostly following that storyline.*

ROY: I have a complete set of them — I have access to them, at least — except for those two or three NAMORA comics from the late '40s, and I believe I managed even to see one of those at a comics store. There wasn't that much in it, really. Strangely enough, most of the stories that I ended up using from the Golden Age were stories that we had been able in one form or another to reprint. That wasn't why I used them, it just so happened that when we were basically cutting apart and using old comic books, we naturally tended to try to get the main stories.

LOU: *The milestones.*

ROY: Right, the origin of the Human Torch, the origin of the Sub-Mariner — which came in black-and-white, thank God, because we couldn't reprint that from the color. One of the early battles between the Torch and the Sub-Mariner was the first thing that we reprinted, and the origin of Toro that would come up later on, and the story where the Torches destroy **Hitler.** All that has been re-printed, although it would have been used anyway in SAGA OF THE SUB-MARINER, whether it was reprinted or not.

One of the few items that hadn't been reprinted that I went back to was the origin of Namora, after the war — I managed to go back and make *some* kind of sense out of the various stories that Bill and others did with Namora over the years. She actually had three other names and things of this sort, so I

SAGA OF THE SUB-MARINER #1 (art: Rich Buckler)

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"Marvel's Silver Age: a one-writer company . . . Stan (Lee)."

just enjoyed doing that. And of course I had to deal with the fact that two or three different times it looked as if almost all of Atlantis and even the emperor had been killed, and then he would pop up again.

LOU: *He was very tough (laughter).*

ROY: I enjoyed doing that. I know that I and other people can get a little too carried away sometimes with continuity. Where you start and stop with that depends on a lot of personal factors that sometimes have little or nothing to do with sales — they don't *help* it but they don't necessarily hurt it, either, as long as you're not too dependent upon people knowing that much when they come into the magazine. But I have such a real revulsion to — we mention no names here — but toward the comics companies and writers and editors that try to disown all past continuity. I make no apologies for that, I really have no respect for that at all. If you're trying to get people to stick with you for more than a couple of years, for as many years as you can, then I think you owe them something in return. This is, of course, something the editors and publishers have to decide — you expect the writers and artists to be irresponsible (laughter). The editors should *not* be.

LOU: *And the old history gives you something to work off of, rather than cutting it off and saying we'll just play with this right now.*

ROY: Yes. DC, for example, has basically ignored a lot of continuity that's even post-CRISIS. It just makes no sense, there's no great reason for it, but the company had no real policy that said thou shalt not do this. And it's kind of a shame because it doesn't mean that the stories or the writers or the artists are inferior, it simply means that it leaves the reader a little bit *confused.* And it's hard to take a story seriously if you *know* that it's likely to be disregarded the moment that some other writer or editor finds it in the least inconvenient. That kind of thing *can* be done, disregarding old continuity, but it should be done very sparingly.

I say this as an observer — I understand why DC did what it did, to a large part, in CRISIS, but they just didn't stop maybe when they should have. I've told them this and if they don't agree with me that's their concern, it doesn't change my mind one iota. The thing that Marvel's always had is it started off the Silver Age as a one-writer company — Stan did all of the actual scripts just about, and edited the couple he didn't do — even if other people like **Jack Kirby** and **Steve Ditko** and others contributed to the plotting.

When I and a few other people came in, I for a number of years rode herd to make sure that things were pretty consistent, and we tried to tie in things even with the Golden Age. I made a few changes myself, and some of those maybe were good ideas, and some of them were not. But all the way through today — well, I don't know **Tom DeFalco's** attitude personally, because I haven't discussed it with him — but obviously there's always been this strong continuity all the way through, a kind of consistent

OH THESE THREE PAGES, STAN AND STEVE REALLY UNWIND AND HAVE SOME FUN! WE HOPE YOU'LL ENJOY THIS FEATURETTE AS MUCH AS THEY ENJOYED DOING IT!
Stan Lee

From SPIDER-MAN Annual #1 (1964), Steve Ditko has fun with Stan.

"*Young All-Stars* is kind of limping along. It has

The rejected cover to X-MEN #56 by Neal Adams & Tom Palmer.

company viewpoint that is not dependent upon whoever walks through the door and tries to exercise his will. I think that's something important. And it's true for the continuity of ten or twelve years ago — which is now supposed to have happened only a *few* years ago. You have to weed things out, like references to particular presidents and events, every few years you have to update that just a little bit. You should try to find a way to do it . . .

LOU: *Unobtrusively.*

ROY: Yes.

LOU: *It was a shock to me in WORLD'S FINEST to see Superboy coming from a showing of THE GRADUATE.*

ROY: Yes. Originally, he was supposed to be in the late '20s or '30s, but they kept having to bring it up and bring it up. That's one of the problems with *any* kind of continued character that goes on for decades and decades and never grows any older. One of the nice things about writing Golden Age characters *in* that period is that they *stay* there.

LOU: *They stay put in one place.*

ROY: You can have no time pass, or you can do as I have generally done, especially in the ALL-STAR books at DC, which is to have approximately one month take place every year of the series. In the seven or eight years I have been writing at DC — disallowing for the CRISIS and a little time in between the two series — about six months have passed, from December 6, 1941, through the middle of June, 1942.

LOU: *So we've got a lot of World War II to get through.*

ROY: If the book keeps on going. It does cause problems because readers who read a book for two or three years think that two or three years should have passed in the book, but there's no real reason to *assume* that all that happens to these characters in one months can be reported in twenty-something pages. I've got a storyline going on now where about three issues take place in about 24 hours, and there's absolutely nothing exaggerated about that. When you've got a number of characters spread out over a whole country, you could take up an almost infinite amount of time with one or two days. After all, how long was **James Joyce's** ULYSSES? That took place all in one day!

LOU: *Something like that.*

ROY: I'm not comparing myself to **James Joyce**, but the principle is the same.

LOU: *I'm glad your humility's not the same as Stan's (laughter).*

ROY: Oh, you should never take that seriously. Stan always goes off into some kind of a hype, and sometimes maybe that kind of thing went a little far, because it was hard to tell if it was serious or whatever. But, generally speaking, Stan always kept a light touch with it, and even when he was being what seemed a little heavy handed, he never meant it to be taken that terribly seriously. The only danger was whenever you started doing that it came off as a kind of braggadocio, but that really was not intended.

LOU: *Because you couldn't put the tone or the nuance of the words into cold print.*

ROY: Right. I always remember the thing with **Jim Shooter** calling the readers a four letter word or something like that. To the extent that that was true, *if* it was true, it was just some joke.

LOU: *An in-house joke.*

ROY: Right, an in-house joke, at the most. I was no great fan of **Jim Shooter's**, but he got roasted unfairly on something like this that was taken out of context, because it was just a joke and it was not

no heroes in it that anybody's heard of before."

meant. It was not like some racist remark that was *meant* and shouldn't even be said in public in the first place, this was just not meant. He didn't think of readers like that any more than I do.

LOU: *The analogy that comes immediately to mind is Nixon's Watergate tapes.*

ROY: I suppose. It's not like when you've got **James Watt** telling racist jokes, the difference is they were telling jokes that were really racy and they *meant* them. We've *all* said things that maybe we shouldn't have, or that shouldn't see print, but sometimes they're said as jokes and they shouldn't be taken that seriously. Most of us are just trying to make a little money and have a good time. With very rare exceptions most of this stuff is just popular entertainment, and I don't care whether you're talking from **Frank Miller** and **Alan Moore** on down to the lowest. Even the well done comics that advance the form somewhat are *still* popular entertainment, and it's somewhat ridiculous to see these people taking themselves too seriously

LOU: *But maybe it's the only medium they've got to take themselves seriously in.*

ROY: You have to take your work seriously — you can take your work

Issue #22 of Roy and Dann's THE YOUNG ALL-STARS (art: Ron "CRASH RYAN" Harris & Bob Downs, inker).

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"The thing is to get the right combination to reach people."

seriously, but not yourself. That's what everybody is trying to do.

LOU: *That's the subtle distinction. Well, how is YOUNG ALL-STARS doing?*

ROY: YOUNG ALL-STARS is kind of limping along. It has no heroes in it that anybody's heard of before, and it doesn't have a hot writer and artist team — I've been doing this kind of thing for *years* and **Ron Harris** is a very good artist, a very intelligent artist, but not a real "hot" artist — so therefore we're still limping along.

LOU: *One thing I wanted to ask you — I've got it written down here somewhere — what's the challenge inherent in trying to keep a 1940s flavor and yet making it relevant, and all of the time trying to avoid anachronism? For instance, in one book, one of the All-Stars called the Japanese "Japs,' and one of the others said, "Don't you ever say that again!" — but the reality is in 1942 people were calling them Japs and even worse and thinking it was very proper to go and throw them all into concentration camps.*

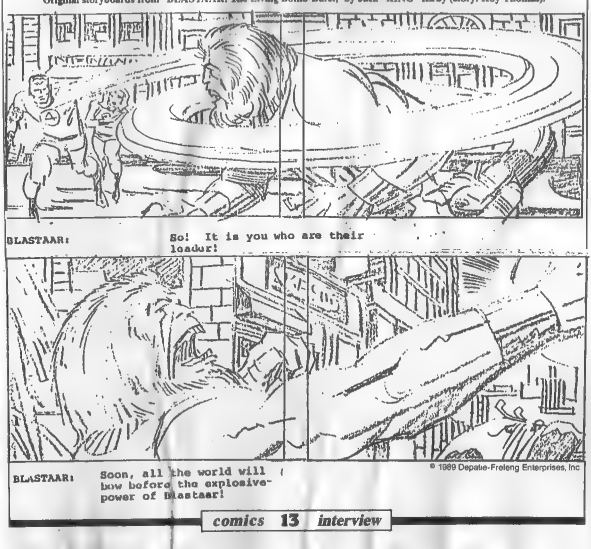
ROY: And whether anybody agreed with that or not, or even thought about it, a word like Japs would be used in the headlines of respectable newspapers, mostly because it was short. But the fact remains that it became accepted, and to that extent of course there's no way that I can totally have these people acting the way they would have, because it's *impossible* to believe that virtually all members of the All-Star Squadron, the Young All-Stars, etc., were *enlightened* enough not to have used insulting terminologies or not to be somewhat racist. I put a little bit of that into one or two characters, like Sandy and Starman, but in reality I'm sure that at one time or another a large number of the heroes of the Golden Age used terms like Japs

LOU: *I recall one HUMAN TORCH story that was titled "Scourge of the Slimy Japs!"*

ROY: Yes. There was one Timely comic in which — it wasn't the cover, but somewhere on the inside — it showed a bunch of fierce Japanese who had all broken out of one of these concentration camps, or whatever they called them, ready to then go off to do sabotage, do all sorts of things, and there was *no* way I would have put something like that into INVADERS. What I'm trying to do is to use historical perspective a little bit, and there are areas where I feel like I can't do it. It's frustrating from an aesthetic viewpoint, to *not* be able to have people talk the way they really would, but what would happen then is they would end up looking like villains when they're not necessarily villains.

The problem is if a person is a hero, he's supposed to be a hero nowadays in the comics, he's supposed to be a hero in

Original storyboards from "BLASTAAR: The Living Bomb-Burst," by Jack "KING" Kirby (story: Roy Thomas).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"I have a complete collection of *J L A* & *Green Lantern* — I

every way except maybe the occasional weakness that the character is allowed within certain acceptable ranges. A hero is *not* permitted to have certain flaws, like being a racist but otherwise a sterling fellow, and I'm sure that — in spite of what seems a contradiction in that — there are people who would come pretty close to that, especially people who aren't necessarily racist but just have a couple of blind spots. After all, it was **Earl Warren** — who was later head of the Supreme Court at the time of the anti-segregation decision, Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas — who was one of the main people responsible, as Attorney General of California, for putting the Japanese-Americans into these internment centers. It's hard to be a hero all of the time.

LOU: *Right, your heroes always have to have the current socially acceptable patterns.*

ROY: They can have all sorts of flaws but they have to be flaws that make them still seem heroic, and that changes from decade to decade. Something Stan wrote in the '60s that seemed heroic then would now seem jingoistic, because our views on racism and sexism and everything else constantly change. And to keep this in perspective, some of the things that seem fairly enlightened *now* aren't necessarily going to seem that way in the future. That cannot be predicted. Someone may be very progressive *now*, just like Stan was for comics in the early '60s, but in the future when people look back there are going to be areas in which he looks just as bad as did the people whose views look bad now.

LOU: *But Stan was the starting point and without that you can't get to where you're at.*

ROY: Exactly.

LOU: *And in writing about the past it's interesting, because you can actually put that in perspective and see where that came from.*

ROY: Yes. You could probably never have done a story about the Japanese internment centers back *then* with what would be considered *now* a realistic and humanistic perspective — the closest one could come was the Good Jap. I remember an Atom chapter in a JUSTICE SOCIETY story in which the Atom takes someone into his confidence whom he refers to as the Good Jap, and that was not considered racist. It would be now, but when **Gardner Fox** wrote it — **Gardner Fox** probably wrote it — it was not, and he was meant to be a fairly sympathetic character. It's easy to disparage this kind of attitude 40 years later, it was not so easy at the time. But times change and you have to be able to read things in perspective, and most people aren't very good at that.

LOU: *Well this is the perceptual trick that gets me, is that no matter what time we're in, we always judge all past heroes by contemporary standards, as we think they should be, and so the heroes of the past are constantly being reinterpreted.*

ROY: And 20 or 30 years ago all of the Russian characters had to be totally bad, and then they went through a period a number of years ago when almost any Russian that was introduced into a strip

Original pencils for the AVENGERS' Kree/Skrull reprint book (by Walt Simonson).

like the books, but they've become kind of irrelevant now."

had to be totally good. In some ways I think progress has been made now where you have a little more of a tightrope being walked, although the pendulum has definitely swung in favor of *not* using them as villains. There may be a couple of fights with the Rocket Red Brigade or something, but most Russian characters now are sympathetic characters — although recently in JUSTICE LEAGUE there was **Gorbachev** ordering somebody killed or something.

The writers and editors nowadays are just as likely to have someone in *our* government doing these villainous things, or at least having it implied. Dann and I, as writers, are constantly appalled in comics and movies at the lengths to which some writers or editors or producers or whatever go to make our government the villain in almost any situation. The military in America is always undervalued, it's always treated badly, until they need it to bail everybody's ass out. The military's got plenty of faults, no doubt about that, but if we didn't have the military we wouldn't be around to do our comic books.

LOU: *What kind of historical research do you do on your average World War II story?*

ROY: That depends on the story. I have a library on World War II and the period, which I have not read nearly all of and I keep adding more books all of the time. I've got biographies, histories, some fiction, quite a few on the military, and I've also managed to get almost every book on the home front, including a number of them published during World War II. I just picked up one the other day that was published in 1944, and immediately I turned to the part where it talks about all of the Japanese being interned, and there's no mention that they were American citizens — "some of these may be loyal" and that kind of thing. And the problem is that since none of them got a chance to be disloyal, the other assumption that probably every one of the *would* have been loyal is also bullshit.

I look through various books that are timetables, to see what's happening in a given time, to try to work in little bits of history. Sometimes I'm criticized for that, sometimes perhaps it's too expository, but *I've* found that in those days, *sure*, sometimes people would go around for days and never mention the war. But when you've got these heroes fighting the enemy on the home front, like Axis Amerika or Baron Blitzkrieg or whoever, they are more likely to be thinking about the war and what's happening in the world. And of course Fury is Grecian, Tsunami is Japanese-American, and I've just brought in several from other countries as well — in fact, one of the things that I *don't* have is a white Caucasian girl (laughter). That's why I sort of Americanized Fury more than I maybe otherwise would have.

But between all of these various books on the home front, and some encyclopedias and things, I still make plenty of mistakes. The other day I got ahold of a book that wrote something unclearly and I ended up referring to **DeGaulle** as **Colonel DeGaulle**, and I didn't know when he had been promoted to general,

"Dann & I, as writers, are appalled at the lengths some writers

and then I found out that by 1942 he'd been a general for a year or two and so the next issue I had him referred to as **General DeGaulle**. Of course somebody could —

LOU: *On Earth-2 he got promoted later (laughter).*

ROY: But the thing is that there are going to be a lot of anachronisms also because I don't draw the strip and I can't look after every single detail. One of the joys of working with **Ron Harris** in particular is that Ron came to YOUNG ALL-STARS with a great interest in history. He has always enjoyed doing this kind of thing — he did the CRASH RYAN series for Epic, which was set in a sort of parallel world 1930s.

The other thing that I do, which some people like very much and some people dislike very much, in YOUNG ALL-STARS particularly, is bringing in other literary creations in order to . . . just to be a little bit different with this comic than the rather incestuous comic books referring only to other comics and movies and television. I would like to see a little bit more than that, and one of the ways to do it is to bring in some other literary creations as if they were real. The latest one we're doing is **Arthur Conan Doyle's** LOST WORLD.

LOU: *I remember way back in one of the very first ALL-STAR SQUADRONs you mentioned Professor Indiana Jones.*

ROY: Just a passing mention. I couldn't have used him legally, if I could have maybe I would have. But I was able to use Hugo Danner of **Phillip Wylie's** GLADIATOR, **Jules Verne's** Captain Nemo, **Edgar Allen Poe's** material, and so many other things. Sometimes there are complaints of the books being footnoted to death, but if you don't count the fact that I have more foreign expressions that sometimes require footnotes to explain what's being said, I don't excessively footnote the books compared to a

THEN, SILENTLY, EFFORTLESSLY ...LIKE SOME GREAT, VENGEFUL BIRD OF PREY...HE SWOOPS INTO THE MOONLESS, CLOUD-DRAPED SKY...TOWARDS A TOWERING STRUCTURE NEARBY...
BEHOLD...THE VISION!
AN EERIE EXPEDITION INTO UNEXPLORED REALMS, CONDUCTED BY:
STAN LEE, EDITOR!
ROY THOMAS, WRITER!
JOHN BUSCEMA, ARTIST!
GEORGE KLEIN, INKER!
SAM ROSEN, LETTERER!

Splash page from AVENGERS #57 (Stan, Roy, John & George) — introduction of THE VISION (II).

or editors or producers go to make our govt. the villain."

The re-teaming of Thomas, Adams and Palmer (after AVENGERS & X-MEN) — for AMAZING ADVENTURES #5 (starring The Inhumans).

GORGON'S CHOKED ACCUSATION--PERHAPS THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL-- BUT YOU DON'T HEAR IT. BLACK BOLT, AS YOU SKIM AN OCEAN'S TROUBLED SURFACE...
YOUR MIND IS ON YOUR MISSION--AND ONLY ON YOUR MISSION...
--EXCEPT FOR ONE SPECIAL CORNER OF THAT SUPRA-HUMAN BRAIN--ONE TINY, REMOTE, BUT ALL-IMPORTANT CORNER...

lot of other comics. Other books at both Marvel and DC sometimes seem to have a footnote every time something relates to another issue, or another series. I actually don't like to do this, I like to save it for something that's either more informational or essential. I'm not *ashamed* of putting footnotes in the books, I'm very proud of it.

LOU: *And I've noticed quite a few times you've put references back in the letters page.*

ROY: I prefer to do it that way, with maybe one reference that says to see the letters page, like I did in YOUNG ALL-STARS #22 about Vichy, because while I feel a need to mention these things, I don't want to interrupt the story. I had a feeling that even a lot of people who have seen CASABLANCA haven't the *foggiest* notion of the political realities behind this strange world in the movie. It's like they think that France was neutral and Germany was just there, and it wasn't really that way at all. France was mostly conquered and Vichy, France, was almost a fiction.

LOU: *And I wonder if they ever catch the importance when Claude Rains throws a bottle of Vichy water in the garbage.*

ROY: Most people won't. I didn't consciously think of that, for example, when I had Dyna-Mite refer to Phantasmo saying, "Sorry, I mistook you for Vichy water" (laughter). Then I used that as the excuse to refer to the footnote, and it was only later that I *consciously* thought of that scene at the end of CASABLANCA where **Claude Rains** throws the Vichy water away. But at the time when that came out, early '43, it was right after the invasion of North Africa and actually the end of Vichy because then the Nazis took over *all* of France.

And it's kind of funny about CASABLANCA because that's a good example of a movie that was basically patriotic but has been mistakenly referred to as being romantic. When you think about it what happens in the end is the two people who love each other sacrifice for the greater good. The woman goes off with someone that she likes and respects very much but doesn't love, in order to keep him going, and the man who loves her and knows that she loves him sacrifices his love for the good of the war effort. It's amusing to me that people can think of this as being romantic, in the sense that the word is usually used now. If anything it's almost anti-romantic.

LOU: *When you were doing that analogy what flashed through my mind, believe it or not, was the STAR TREK episode Harlan Ellison wrote, "City on the Edge of Forever," in which Kirk goes back to the 1930s, falls in love with Joan Collins, and then can't save her from certain death because then World War II would be lost.*

ROY: There are a lot of nice paradoxes you can get into with things like that. I've had a lot of fun playing around with those and hope I can go on doing it for many a year — and '42 is one of the best years of the war for that kind of thing. In '43 things had settled down a little bit, and it would actually be easier to do things with less reference to the war, but that's still some time away. YOUNG ALL-STARS would have to last another 50 or 60 issues, go beyond the number of issues that ALL-STAR SQUADRON ran, before we would get out of 1942.

LOU: *With YOUNG ALL-STARS you've now moved pretty far away from what you started with in ALL-STAR SQUADRON, I mean in terms of the old Golden Age heroes and so forth.*

ROY: It is frustrating not to be able to use the old Golden Age heroes. DC has a policy now — which I discovered only by accidentally breaking it, no one had informed me in advance — that they don't like to use any characters on the covers that are . . . like *doppelgangers*, you know. For example, the old Green Lantern, he can be in the story but *not* on the cover, because they don't want to confuse people. This is a policy that does not make *any* sense to me, but there's no fighting it. that's what DC wants, that's what DC gets.

LOU: *But it doesn't make any sense because there are many people who*

"Even a lot of people who have seen *Casablanca* haven't the

would be more likely to buy a book if it had the old Golden Age Green Lantern on the cover.

ROY: And it doesn't hurt anything at all, if we just avoid using the name then there shouldn't be any confusion, because the people that are going to recognize the character without the name on the cover are the people who are not going to be confused in the first place. But we all have a tendency — I did the same thing when I was editor-in-chief at Marvel — policies have a way of coming into being and then they just exist for their own sake.

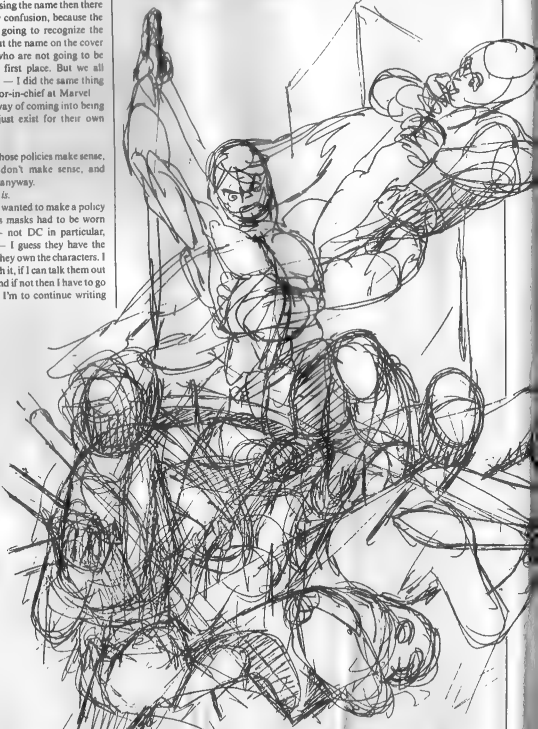
LOU: *Inertia.*

ROY: Some of those policies make sense, some of them don't make sense, and who's to decide anyway.

LOU: *The boss is.*

ROY: So if they wanted to make a policy that everybody's masks had to be worn upside-down — not DC in particular, *any* company — I guess they have the right to do it, if they own the characters. I can disagree with it, if I can talk them out of it then fine, and if not then I have to go along with it if I'm to continue writing the book.

Anyway, at this stage, I am mostly interested in YOUNG ALL-STARS, in writing about those particular characters — although this in no way diminishes my desire to write about the entire All-Star Squadron or the Justice Society, even without Wonder Woman. It's just that at the present time the policy is against that.



From the sketchbook of Gil Kane, the original cover-rough for CONAN #12 (later pencilled by Gil Kane and inked by Vince Colletta).

foggiest notion of the political realities behind the movie."

Unpublished panels from AVENGERS #101 (plot: Ellison, story: Thomas, and art: R. Buckler).

LOU: *What would you think about a series, kind of an ALL-STAR SQUADRON, set back in the '60s now? So much history could be played with from that decade now, an especially turbulent time, and since DC seems to have cut off so much history it would seem there would be a heck of a lot you could do with that time period, if anybody can figure out what to do with it.*

ROY: That's part of the problem. For example, when I was working on the Manhunters' SECRET ORIGINS for MILLENNIUM, about a year post-CRISIS — or more, LEGENDS had been in-between — things should have been straightened out by then. I was told by editors that I could use Superman and Batman in the Justice League, and later when the book came out I was told they shouldn't have been shown together, but at the time when I asked for any restrictions, they didn't *know* them — they only decided on these restrictions *after* I had *broken* them, I guess (laughter). And it was no big deal, but the thing is it does create a problem. There was another book in which somehow six months to a year after CRISIS had all been published there was a flashback, by another editor and writer, to the breakup of the JSA in 1951, and there's Wonder Woman even though she should have been missing.

It would be kind of interesting to do that. They recently did a SECRET ORIGINS in which they had the origin of the Justice League of America and they managed to retroactively work in Black Canary — which made perfectly good sense — and I can see where it would be kind of fun to do some more things like that. There has been some talk about doing an update on the relationship between the Justice League and the Justice Society, but I'm not sure I would like the way they would want that done. I wouldn't mind doing it the way that *I* see it, I just wouldn't care much for seeing it

"There are complaints of books being footnoted to death."

done with certain other sensibilities, but again it's their decision.

And I don't think at this stage I would have any *interest* in doing that, because I *like* the Silver Age material but now DC's disowned so much of it that it seems so irrelevant to me that I find it very difficult to think about it. I've taken all of my Silver Age DC books — I have a complete collection of JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA and GREEN LANTERN and so forth and I moved them all up about ten feet off the ground because I know that I'm never going to have to refer to them. I like the books. I'm not going to get rid of them, but they've become kind of irrelevant now. The Flash is dead, the Justice League of America has been restructured, Wonder Woman and Superman and Batman weren't ever in it, and I just feel like it doesn't have any reality for me now.

And I think that DC would find it more confusing than anything else. It would be even more confusing in *some* ways than the World War II stuff where at least you've got a whole mess of different characters for the most part except they've also gotten rid of the Golden Age Superman and Batman and Wonder Woman, which I'll *never* agree was a good idea.

LOU: *I know. The problem in the continuity, or the problem in the identity thing, has of course come up with the Silver Age characters — nobody wants to pin down where they are at now or anything like that because possibly they're afraid of the aging, and possibly because they can't get a consensus on anything.*

ROY: Yet at the same time they sort of count them as having happened, like NEW TEEN TITANS refers to old cases occasionally. Even if they aren't teenagers anymore, how long ago could these things have happened? (Laughter.) It's been over 20 years since TEEN TITANS was first out. But there *is* a lot of difficulty with the Silver Age material at DC because of CRISIS and so forth. Marvel's material has always been a little bit more consistent, despite the problems with **President Kennedy** or **Johnson** or **Nixon** or whoever having shown up from time to time.

The difference is that almost none of the Silver Age Marvel characters have any connection with the Golden Age. Sub-Mariner does, but he's got a length-

Rejected pencils from SUB-MARINER #26 (1970) by Sal Buscema (story: Roy Thomas).

"Even *War and Rememberance* didn't get the youth vote."

ened lifespan. That was no problem at all to work into SAGA, in fact the only problem I had was with the most recent SUB-MARINER series in which something was stated as having happened in 1952 which didn't make any sense in the continuity, so I had it happening three years later. The event wasn't bad but the timing was very sloppy research, and that turned out to be one of the worst continuity problems I had. Sometimes writers don't check things very carefuly, and then the editors have to be on top of things, that should be their job.

So at Marvel there's no real need to refer to much of the Golden Age, except maybe with the Human Torch coming up now in AVENGERS. Before that only Captain America and the Sub-Mariner had carried over, and with Captain America it's just a matter of how long he stayed in the ice. The Sub-Mariner's been aging slowly and is still in his prime. And the Human Torch was an android! So unless you particularly *want* to bring those other characters back, there's no reason to. And I totally agree, for the most part there's no reason to do those characters at *this* stage unless you keep them in the Golden Age. And you don't need to do that with the DC Golden Age characters either, with the exception of the Spectre or the Doctor Fate personna because they can be said to be immortal. So you can just forget about the Golden Age characters, at least in terms of modern continuity.

That doesn't mean that it doesn't make sense to sometimes do a story set in the '30s or the '40s or the '50s with them. I would love to do something like I worked out once with **Don Glut,** who actually wrote the story for WHAT IF?, which was a sort of '50s proto Avengers group. It had my anachronistic 3-D Man, and it had a few characters from the '50s who hadn't been in series stories, like a robot, and a few other characters popped up *had* been around, like Namora and Marvel Boy and Venus. That would be a real fun book to do, and I think in aesthetic terms there's no reason for it to be any less valid than THE AVENGERS or THE FANTASTIC FOUR or whatever. Whether people would *buy* it or not I don't know. Even WAR AND REMEMBRANCE didn't get the youth vote in the ratings recently, because World War II is a million years away to them. Vietnam is a million years

MY CARRY-ALL CYLINDER SHOULD BE SAFE... BURIED HERE BENEATH A THIN LAYER OF SOIL!
NO EARTHMAN MUST EVER FIND IT... FOR HIS OWN SAKE AS MUCH AS FOR MINE!
NOW TO LEARN IF I'VE MODIFIED MY JET-BELT AS SUCCESSFULLY AS I DID THE BLASTER!
THEN, AT THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH OF A SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT BUTTON ON THE SPACE OFFICER'S BELT...
I CAN SEE THE SHIP NOW... LEVELING OFF INTO HOVERING POSITION!
SURROUNDED BY ITS AURA OF NEGATISM, IT IS INVISIBLE TO THE EYES OF EARTHMEN!
BUT, MINE IS THE VISION OF... A KREE!
THOUGH IT WAS ONLY YESTERDAY THAT I LEFT THE CRAFT... THE SIDE OF MY BELOVED UNA...
...I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HER... TO HOLD HER AGAIN!

One of Roy's early works, CAPTAIN MARVEL (Marvel Super-Heroes #13). Illustrations by Gene Colan and Paul Reinman.

"Decades really don't tend to end right on the dot, the

away to them.

LOU: *That's true.*

ROY: To the 15 and 20-year-olds who make up that part of the TV and movie audience.

LOU: *Which was a surprise to me. When I was a kid, growing up in the 1960s, it seemed like about 35% of your prime time TV was about World War II*

ROY: Really, was it ever that large?

LOU: *I really don't know, I'm making up an arbitrary figure, but we had tons and tons and tons of World War II era programming, stuff like COMBAT and THE WACKIEST SHIP IN THE NAVY and so on*

ROY: And of course when you were growing up that was only 15 or 20 years in the past. We don't have much stuff nowadays which takes place in the '60s, let alone the '70s — who would know what to *do* about the '70s (laughter). It seemed like nothing happened, maybe that was a good title for the decade. Except for the end of the Vietnam War and a couple of things, it would be hard to give any kind of feeling to the '70s. In the '60s and the early '70s, which was really like an extension of the '60s — decades really don't tend to end right on the dot, the '50s didn't really end until **Kennedy's** assassination in some ways — because of the student movement and the war and those kind of things that you can really lock onto, there's a real "feel" to be found there. But there's not really a whole lot of '60s nostalgia these days.

LOU: *Maybe it's just the usual American*

Unpublished illustration by Barry Smith (circa 1969) — done during the "Starr Saxon" trilogy in DAREDEVIL #50-52.

'50s didn't really end until Kennedy's assassination."

tradition of trying to forget our past.

ROY: Something like that, which is why we go on repeating the same mistakes.

LOU: *One last thing I want to get to: Back in the '70s, DC embarked on an incredible reprint program, tons and tons and tons of '40s and '50s and sometimes '60s material, and they were great books. Why isn't that being done now?*

ROY: Not much interest.

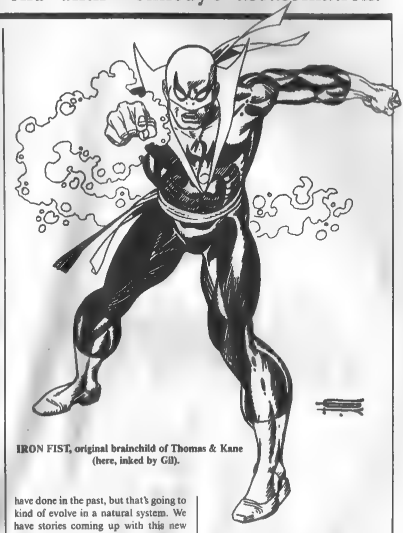
LOU: *I was wondering if there was any physical problem with it.*

ROY: No more than there ever was. They just don't see that there's a huge amount of interest in it, so they just don't bother to do it. They talked about it a couple of years ago and then they didn't do it. That was why I created the new SECRET ORIGINS, because it was apparent they were never going to reprint the stories, that's worked out reasonably well. We have a few that haven't come out yet because they changed the policy of the book, but basically we got through several dozen very good stories, often with quite good art.

LOU: *Well, let's move on to some of your recent projects that have come out, such as CAPTAIN THUNDER.*

ROY: Well, CAPTAIN THUNDER AND BLUE BOLT is something we're really quite fond of — it's done for Hero Comics, published by **Dennis Mallonee**. It's always nice to work for one of the alternative press companies — if they're still *calling* them that, I don't know. We had known Dennis since the early '80s when he was the publisher of FANTASY BOOK, which of course is mostly prose with a few illustrations, and he was always very friendly. Then he decided to do Hero Comics and we came up with this idea to explore some relationships that had been kind of yanked away in INFINITY when suddenly the JSA was totally out — we lost the parent-child relationship there, which was the cornerstone of that series, and the series in many ways never recovered. CAPTAIN THUNDER wasn't the same thing exactly, but it was another attempt to explore the same *type* of thing. There is the relationship between a father and son in this case, and they're both superheroes and they have an uneasy relationship, and the book in terms of the way it's going kind of writes itself.

Our whole thing is that we're trying to keep a fairly *realistic* world there, and that makes it sometimes kind of hard to get in the usual supervillain. We *probably* will be going more in a direction of more superheroes and fantastic things than we have done in the past, but that's going to kind of evolve in a natural system. We have stories coming up with this new group which is not *exactly* supervillains, but they are opponents for Captain Thunder and Blue Bolt.



IRON FIST, original brainchild of Thomas & Kane (here, inked by Gil).

LOU: *Are they something like the Force of July, the government operatives in OUTSIDERS?*

ROY: They might be — of course the Force of July were pretty nasty people (laughter). But it's something that we enjoy working on very much. And of course we have one of the Champions, Sparkplug, appearing in those same issues — that's the first Hero Comics crossover, I suppose. It's a lot of fun, and of course we cooperate with Dennis on that. He had an electrical character, we had a couple of electrical characters, we figured we may as well *plug* them in together (laughter).

DANN THOMAS: I think we should describe the overall storyline. The father is a superhero who was discredited twelve years ago, went into hiding, essentially didn't even know his son, and now the 17-year-old son has now sought out the father. It basically revolves around the classic dilemma of father and son, the stranger relationship, and that's essentially what we play on.

ROY: We will probably be doing a couple of other projects here and there for Hero Comics, which has expansion plans. Depending on various factors we *hope* to do some more work, maybe get into some graphic novels, things of that sort.

LOU: *CAPTAIN THUNDER is a trip for me. When I was a kid we had the Golden Age revival stories, World war II heroes being transplanted into the 1960s, and now you've written one about a '80s hero being transplanted into the present. That really must make you feel dated.*

DANN: It sure does (laughter).

ROY: Essentially, Captain Thunder should have gone into hiding about the time I moved from New York to Cali-

"We do have plans to bring back Mary Marvel and Captain

Neal Adams' original pencils (pg. 8) from AVENGERS #93, 1971.

fornia, which doesn't seem like all that long ago — but it is (laughter).

Another thing we're working on, it's a little up in the air right now as far as art is concerned, is the new SHAZAM book. The sales on the four-issue mini-series connected with LEGENDS were really quite sucessful and we've been trying to get something together ever since. Basically, we're still looking around for just the *perfect* artist for the book. Of course, Captain Marvel was once the most popular comic book character in the world, and he's leased by DC, and I don't know about *now* but only a few years ago Captain Marvel was one of their two or three most popular merchandising properties. I feel we have lost a little momentum from that other series. It's very frustrating to Dann and me because we've poured a lot into it.

LOU: *On that last series with Captain Marvel, you changed the character back to his beginning and did a couple of other things differently. Did you have any trouble with people at DC or people in fandom because of that?*

ROY: One could argue with anything that we did or will do in the future, just like I could with **Byrne's** Superman. **Perez's** Wonder Woman, *anybody's* Batman, but just like most of those books it was done with a lot of affection — whether somebody agrees with what was done or not. Something had to be done, of course, and no two people will agree to exactly what it should be. But anyway, it was fairly successful.

And that is probably the one old-time character that I *personally* am the most interested in doing. I am particularly interested because of the fact that it's a little different Captain Marvel because he *is* Billy Batson, he's this 15-year-old boy and he doesn't change totally just because all of a sudden he has a body like Superman. I think that's one of the things that was explored in a different way back in the '40s, and I want to explore it in another way in the '80s and hopefully into the '90s. And we do have plans to bring back Mary Marvel and Captain Marvel, Jr.

LOU: *All right!*

ROY: — in an altered form, they will not be exactly the same.

LOU: *I'm glad to see that. Is one of the problems with this that you have at least two different looks for the Captain Marvel, either the C.C. Beck version of the 1940s or the more recent Don Newton version?*

ROY: Yes, yes. **Don Newton** would have been the artist — in fact, if they don't change their minds we have a painting **Don Newton** sold us a year before he died that we'd like to use as a wrap-around cover in kind a tribute to Don. I hope we can still do that. Don's art would have been *perfect* for this book. I enjoyed very much when I worked with him the brief period of time there in INFINITY.

Which brings up another book. One of the things we were talking about doing with INFINITY — because the sales of the book actually had *not* gone down despite the price raise, it was just DC had other places they wanted to put their

Marvel, Jr. — in an altered form, not the same."

money and INFINITY had remained sort of relatively flat so they preferred to start a new title — what we came up with *originally* was going to be a recasting of INFINITY, a couple of the members and this and that with a different name. But that seemed rather artificial because, you know, it would just be doing it for the sake of doing it. One of the things that I had always wanted to do — Dann and I had always wanted to do — was a series on Helix, which was a group that was created fairly early on in the series; Mr. Bones, in fact, was actually created before there was an INFINITY book, he was going to be a member of Infinity and then at the last minute I changed my mind — in terms of costume, it wouldn't have been quite the same character. So he ended up as a "semi-villain," but originally he was going to be in Infinity and was replaced at the last minute by Obsidian.

So in doing HELIX we *will* be recasting a couple of the members; I want to redesign a few of the costumes and so forth, maybe some of the powers will change, one or two of them may die. There can't be a lot of HELIX experimental characters coming up, but there is *one* character that could be there to tie in to INFINITY, and that's Wildcat. So we do have a nice cast of characters there. The artist is going to be **Michael Bair,** who did the last few issues of INFINITY anyway.

LOU: *Well, any more current stuff we can get into?*

DANN: You should mention the things with **Gil Kane**, Roy.

ROY: Well, I'm not sure, I don't know when DC wants to announce some of these things. I *am* doing some projects with **Gil Kane** that I am quite excited about, for DC, but they may not want to announce them for awhile. But as far as new projects those are the main things. There may be some others popping up, and of course there's ongoing projects, the ELRIC books for First and some of the SECRET ORIGINS.

LOU: *Okay. Dann, for you I don't have any biography whatever. Why don't you sketch in —*

ROY: She doesn't have a history (laughter).

DANN: I just emerged out of the ether (laughter). I grew up in the Los Angeles area, the South Bay region. I did a *lot* of writing in school until I reached the point where I could choose classes in which I didn't *have* to write, and at that point I actually managed to get through UCLA and get a BA in economics and only had to write two papers; in fact, I even managed to *combine* one that was the effects of mountains upon rainfall, I did that for a geology class and a plant physiology class at the same time (laughter). I did very very little writing in school.

When I got out of college I managed a life insurance office, and I met Roy and continued in life insurance until Roy started foisting some work off on me (laughter). And very very slowly I discovered that he was having me do more and more plotting, and then came WONDER WOMAN #300 and Roy decided that I should do the scripting on that as well, at least do a first draft of the scripting.

ROY: A rough draft.

DANN: A *very* rough draft (laughter). Since that time I've gotten more and more involved with the writing, so it's not a very rough draft anymore, a lot of times it's not even a rough draft.

LOU: *What did he specifically foist on you at first?*

DANN: Well, it was some CONAN plotting. We would be out for the evening and Roy, totally *obsessed* with comics as he is, would be talking about some plotting he had to do. At this point I wasn't reading comics. The first comic I

"There are books that would be fun to [illegible], if the chance

Roy Thomas & Jackson Guice team together for a new DOCTOR STRANGE series.

read since I was a kid was **Steve Gerber's** HOWARD THE DUCK, and I *loved* that a lot and nothing else seemed to be quite as much fun — I still prefer humor comics.

LOU: *What was your favorite when you were a kid?*

DANN: Well, when I was a kid I wasn't allowed to buy comics —

ROY: Or even read them if somebody else bought them.

LOU: *Oh, shame!*

DANN: I would read them at other people's homes, but I never reached the fan stage. I liked SUPERMAN a lot as a kid, that seemed to be the comic book that my cousins always had piled up, and of course DONALD DUCK and UNCLE SCROOGE. I think they even had comics of the Warner Brothers characters.

LOU: *Oh, yeah, all over the place.*

DANN: But that was very insignificant, all I can really remember of the

came up, even some of the Robert E. Howard material."

SUPERMAN comics were these *dreadful* covers! (Laughter.) You just had to read them for the explanation of what was going on!

ROY: That's the idea, though.

DANN: Yeah, well it worked.

ROY: The cover would be Superman with a giant head or something, you were *supposed* to look inside to see what happened.

LOU: *Right, or Superman getting gassed to death while all these monsters are toasting him*

DANN: Right. Then right about the time when Roy switched from Marvel to DC was when I became a little bit more involved with the comics. I was involved in the conception of ARAK —

ROY: That originally grew out of some book project ideas --

DANN: Yeah

ROY: – we had that were not going to be. Dann had plotted a CONAN story that **Ernie Colon** illustrated for Marvel, and got some credit for that. I think your first plot was one of the very early ARAKs. We were ready to leave for our belated honeymoon in Paris and you typed out a first draft of the plot for the sixth or seventh issue of ARAK, that was probably the first *writing* you did.

DANN: Yeah, that was the first time I had to actually sit down and write it out.

ROY: I was in one room typing away at CAPTAIN CARROT, she was in the other room typing the draft of an ARAK plot (laughter).

DANN: And then after the involvement in ARAK I was involved in creating the characters for INFINITY, and after INFINITY . . . what else did we do? (Laughter.) It's slipped my mind now.

ROY: Well, of course, YOUNG ALL-STARS, several things were mostly your ideas.

DANN: Yeah.

ROY: Others were mine. I think one of the first writing credits you got, really as cowriter, was probably the backup feature

DANN: Yeah.

ROY: We told **Dick Giordano** we wanted to start doing this, because it's *weird* all the women who wrote anonymously, like **Mike Grell's** wife on WARLORD, and we wanted to do things out in the open. You know, we were working on it together, there wasn't any reason not to. There were a lot of other people doing the same thing but wouldn't admit it, not because they didn't want to themselves but quite often they felt the company would be prejudiced against them or something. But Dick accepted the fact that we were working together as a team, and it had worked out quite well. And then there was her solo career.

LOU: *That's right, you wrote the Raven stories in THUNDER AGENTS.*

DANN: It was short-lived — but what a dream working with **George Perez**.

LOU: *Yes, and those were good stories.*

DANN: Thank you.

LOU: *I'm a big fan of the original THUNDER AGENTS, I even wrote the article in THE COMICS READER which I like to think in my own little egotistical way led to THUNDER AGENTS being brought back.*

ROY: And there are a lot of them — there are more THUNDER AGENTS comics than there were THUNDER agents.

LOU: *That's true, unfortunately, and they're almost all bad.*

ROY: And one of our favorite projects, too, which Dann did the first draft on and a considerable part of that survived, more heavily than most — was the JONNI THUNDER series.

DANN: Well, the CRIMSON AVENGER we're doing right now is –

ROY: Yeah, both of them, including the SECRET ORIGINS; I took over all of the WAR OF THE WORLDS stuff but the rest of the copy is really a sort of, you know, light to moderate or heavy on different pages, an editing of what Dann wrote. It would vary from page to page or book to book, and the same thing is true with SHAZAM. Some things are *particularly* a collaboration.

LOU: *Do you ever get to a point where you look at a page and you can't remember who did what?*

DANN: No.

ROY: I do all the time (laughter). Dann always remembers everything she did — she has a very good memory, probably because she hasn't been at as long or as hard so maybe it's more important to her.

DANN: *Actually,* it's because there's usually a fight session after Roy does the final draft, or shall we say the semifinal draft, and I look at it and if there's been changes that I don't think make sense, or illogical changes, we have knockdown

Roy Thomas, Gil Kane and Frank Giacoia team up for SPIDER-MAN #102.

"Well, when I was a kid I wasn't allowed to buy comics."

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Pencils from INFINITY SQUAD (Don Newton's last job).

drag-out fights about it. A lot of these things are unfortunately forged in fire.

LOU: *Gosh, why do I suddenly feel like Bob Eubanks? (Laughter.)*

DANN: But, you know, it's all on the level of the material, we don't throw things.

LOU: *So tell me, how does it feel to be back at Marvel during the post-Shooter era?*

ROY: Well, actually, Dann and I were together collaborating during the Shooter era —

DANN: The *end* of the Shooter era.

ROY: As a matter of fact, I even dialogued a story Shooter had plotted, he was quite happy with it. We exchanged a letter or two, we never really talked out loud to each other, and I made an appointment to go there last May but by the time I got back he was gone. But it's sort of interesting. I had been away, had been busy with DC and then with other things, and of course a lot of film writing for several years, and I still am involved peripherally with that because you never know what could become of something or whatever.

But it was *nice* to be back at Marvel. I don't know *all* of the people there, but **John** and **Virginia Romita** are still there, and **Archie Goodwin** and a number of people, **John Buscema** and **Tom Palmer**, and of course there are a few people who had worked with us elsewhere, like **Todd McFarlane** - so it's fine and the people are very friendly, and always were ever since the initial contact was made by **Tom DeFalco** for Dann and me. Everything's been very pleasant, I enjoy it. I've myself written most of the Marvel characters that I was really eager to write, but still there's so many good characters there and new things that can be done with them, and having been away for a number of years you get kind of a new perspective.

LOU: *Right, it gives you a thrill to go back on it fresh.*

ROY: Yeah, yeah. There are any number of books that would be a lot of fun to do if the chance came up, it might even be fun to work with some of the **Robert E. Howard** material.

LOU: *Well, Roy, thanks again. Is there anything you'd like to add in closing?*

ROY: Don't lose this one (laughter).

"I would call ALIENS a project from Hell."

MARK A. NELSON & MARK VERHEIDEN

There we were, the Comics Interview crew, manning our booth at the 1988 San Diego Comics Convention, loaded with lots of new comics, books and magazines, flanked by five-foot high stand-up displays featuring cops and robbers (the Cycops and the X-Thieves), our new promotional video proudly playing on a VCR, and being warmly received by West Coast retailers and fans alike who had long looked forward to our presence there.

What could possibly make our visit even more grand?

How about being nestled between Dark Horse and Apple Comics, surrounded by old friends who are also now enjoying success and recognition as fellow professionals in the comics field?

Naturally, Mark Nelson was next door at Dark Horse to celebrate the success of ALIENS, and one thing led to another (by the way, for anyone who hasn't had the privilege of attending a convention at which Nelson is a guest — Mark is a one-man Convention Host at Large, making absolutely everyone feel welcome and wonderful).

Anyway, one afternoon after the exhibit room closed down but before dinner, we met Marks Verheiden and Nelson for a sort of impromptu reunion party and this irreverent interview is the happy result . . .

Mark A. Nelson & Mark Verheiden relax at yet another comics convention.

"The Ethiopian government refused to transport the food,

Mark Verheiden's THE AMERICAN (#5). (Art: Miehm & Warner.)

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *Let's jump back in time, as if we had the X-Thieves' Fredmobile here. When were we doing fanzine stuff together?*

MARK VERHEIDEN: That must have been like '71, '72. I met **Mitch Scheele** in '72 —

DAK: *Gee, it had to be before that because . . . no, maybe not.*

MARK A. NELSON: It was '68 or '69 for us.

DAK: *Yeah. In '72 I sold my first comics stuff to Skywald and I was thinking that it was before that, but maybe not.*

MARK: I think you had published something when you stayed at my house.

DAK: *And from that time, you were in APAs — ?*

MARK: Yeah, I started APA-5, actually: that was my big thing, and I got into a lot of APAs when I was younger. I actually got into fandom through **Mitch Scheele,** your friend.

DAK: *Yeah, your friend and mine — hi, Mitch.*

MARK: Hi, Mitch! He saw a letter I had written in X-MEN #65 and if it wasn't for that I wouldn't be doing *any* of this I guess. He wrote to me and from *that* I met all of these people in Portland, Oregon — Chris **Warner, Randy Stradley,** and **Sonja Luchini** (my soon to be wife). I met all of these people *through* getting into kind of the Portland scheme of comic things. **Paul Chadwick** joined APA-5 in issue #3, so I met **Paul** when he was 14 or 15, and I was 16 — so we're all bizarrely interconnected in some way. **Frank Miller** joined APA-5 — he probably won't want to hear this, I don't think he's . . . well, I don't want to say "not proud," I don't know —

DAK: *We'll bring out a deluxe lavish edition of all of his APA contributions.* (Laughter.)

MARK: You want to talk to his lawyers, too, huh! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Hi, Frank.*

MARK: Frank and I did a story together, we were going to pitch it to Warren in '77 or '76 and . . . it's not a proud moment for either one of us, not our best work.

DAK: *I think we've all got something on each other here.* (Laughter.) *So, I remember meeting you through Mitch and then we went our separate ways and a great deal of time passed, then suddenly one day there you were doing comics again. What's all this about films? What happened next?*

MARK: What I did, I went to school and I directed those films, the cleft palate film and some others. **Randy Stradley** and I formed a partnership in 1979 and we tried

basically to win their war. I find that to be very ugly."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark A. Nelson
Born: 28 November 1953 — Winnipeg, Manitoba
Current Residence: Kingston, IL
Occupation: I teach art at Northern Illinois University, and I do comics also
Credits: SILVERWING; TALES OF THE DINOSAUR; a lot of stories for JUST IMAGINE; CLONEZONE; inked a lot of people's stuff; ALIENS; I've done a lot of work for TSR, the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS people; I've worked for FANTASY NEWSLETTER; Tonka Toys, actual little comic books for Tonka Toys
Worst Stupidest Job Ever Done: Illustrating a manual on sexual dysfunction. I met with two doctors, a female doctor and her assistant — we met for a *meal* — and they started talking about premature ejaculation, masturbation, all this kind of stuff I was having spaghetti and listening to this. *(Laughter.)*

to raise money to make a feature film which we were going to call DEATH CORPS — a Civil War horror film. We ended up spending about $12,000 to do all of the various Securities and Exchange Commission things you need to do to raise money through a brokerage house, which includes coming up with expensive prospectuses and basically giving all of your money to lawyers.

DAK: *The American way.*

MARK: Yeah, and we were totally screwed. We lost every penny, never made our film, and I look back on that experience actually as my graduate school — I didn't *go* to graduate school but I *paid* for it anyway. *(Laughter.)* So we did that and that got screwed up, and I hung around in Oregon a little longer and then moved to L.A. to break into the movie business, probably 1983. I stayed with **Paul Chadwick** for about six months — which was very nice of him — and I got a job at the L.A. TIMES, worked there five years in advertising. I wrote a few screenplays, one was optioned by M-G-M.

DAK: *You say that so casually, "wrote a few screenplays."*

MARK: Well, it's been a long time ago. I wrote a couple to order, one called STOCKER and another one called TERROR SQUAD — which actually was produced in the most *bastardized* truncated form imaginable, so much so that I took my name off the screenplay

DAK: *But isn't that also the American way?*

MARK: Yeah, I guess. *(Laughter.)* My *life* is an example of the American way.

DAK: *That's probably why you call your book THE AMERICAN*

MARK: Yes. . . . yeah. *(Laughter.)* So I did all those movies and then finally ended up going back with **Randy Stradley** and doing THE AMERICAN, which was in fact the first comic book I ever wrote — except for the one I did with **Frank Miller** when we were ten years old or whatever.

DAK: *Let's bring that one out.*

MARK: Well — *(Laughter.)* It'll be in

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark Verheiden
Born: 26 March 1956 — Portland, OR
Current Residence: Pasadena, CA
Occupation: Full-time Free-lance Comic-Book Writer
Credits: THE AMERICAN, ALIENS; THE PHANTOM; PREDATOR; a movie called TERROR SQUADS
Is Really Enthusiastic About: EVIL DEAD II, best movie of the decade
Worst Stupidest Job Ever Done: I directed a 70-minute film on cleft palates — color, 70 minutes, sync sound. *(Laughter.)* I got a job as film director for the state of Oregon, so I made a film about cleft palates with people with cleft palates. I never did watch it all the way through but I understand it turned out pretty well.

DARK HORSE PRESENTS someday — no, it won't, it won't, it's really bad.

DAK: *That'll be FRANK MILLER RESENTS.*

MARK: FRANK MILLER SUES COMICS. *(Laughter.)* So that's basically where I've been at. Only recently have I decided to do it full-time, so now I'm doing it full-time and I'm working for DC and stuff like that.

DAK: *You've given up your day job?*

MARK: Quit the day job about three months ago as we speak. That was a ma-

From ALIENS (Nelson pencils/Verheiden script).

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"I got roped into ALIENS and then I met Mark."

More pencils from Mark Verheiden & Mark Nelson's ALIENS.

jor decision. I was there five years and three days — not that I was counting. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *That's a tough decision, the point at which you decide "I think I'll just go free-lance now."*

MARK: Yeah, it really was. It was a good job, the L.A. TIMES is a great place to work, no doubt about it. Now they have a hiring freeze so I can't go back; they're running into tough times, I guess.

MAN: Buy the books, buy the books!

MARK: Please, buy THE AMERICAN! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What are you going to be doing for DC?*

MARK: I'm doing THE PHANTOM, a monthly series to be drawn by Luke McDonnell. That's the traditional old Phantom, that's the one *monthly* book I'm doing. I've done a Blackhawk story, a Martian Manhunter story, an eight-chapter Speedy story.

DAK: *That drug-crazed kid, right?*

MARK: That drug-crazed wacky kid with the arrows.

MAN: No, this is the little kid who throws

"It's only fair to warn you, we all are naked here."

himself in a glass of water and fizzes away. *(Laughter.)* For the older generation.

MARK: Yeah, right. I think that's a great name, by the way, for a drug addict — Spee-dy! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *I'll be glad to see THE PHANTOM. I never understood why there wasn't a PHANTOM comic. Boy, that guy is great! He's got the Skull Cave and whole generations of Phantoms before him.*

MARK: The rings, the good ring and the bad ring. That whole African thing, I think, is going to be really fun. The non-super aspect of it is really fun, too; *I like* the fact that he's a regular man. He's a regular man who's pretty *obsessed*, in that he's basically fighting a fight that was created like in the 1500s, but conversely a regular man who has to meet a girl and get married and continue his line or he's just out of luck. He has to be *social* enough to meet a girl, have a sex life, get married . . . well, reverse that. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Is he just going to hang out with white girls, though? I mean, he's there in Africa and all. . .*

MARK: Well, he meets and marries Diana Palmer in the strip — to give you an idea.

MAN: Haha-haha-ha.

MARK: Mark can probably help you on that one.

MAN: I was just thinking of the transcriber having to put all of the haha-haha-has in this thing. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: Please put in the haha-has

DAK: *Well, I always wondered about Tarzan all alone in the jungle all those years.*

MARK: Well, there are the apes.

MAN: Baboons.

MARK: Elephants, rhinos.

MAN: Garbage cans.

MARK: Cantaloupes.

JULIA MATHER: *Cantaloupes?*

MARK: Mayonnaise jars.

MAN: It's those mayonnaise jars that washed up on the beach that really had him confused. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Mark, we're going to talk to you, yes, but we're on a roll here — with mayonnaise.* (Laughter.) *Are you going to set THE PHANTOM in modern Africa, you know, with all of the crazy stuff that's going on?*

MARK: Yeah, in fact I've — I should state that we're talking about this before I've written the first script, but I've written the first 13 outlines — and yes, it is set in modern Africa and several of the plots, several of the outlines, deal with modern problems. One is the problem that Bob Geldof's LIVE AID ran into, they tried to get the food in and the Ethiopian government for various political reasons refused to transport it, basically to win their war, I guess. I find that to be a very *ugly* situation.

JULIA: *So did Bob Geldof.*

MARK: Right, so will the Phantom. The Phantom is only one man, though, so he can't just *solve* an entire situation, so I'm trying to come up with some ways to personalize it so he can solve some small aspect of it.

DAK: *Are you going to deal at all with the traditional thing — Tarzan and the Phantom and all these guys are the great white hope there in Africa and they're going to show the black guys how to do stuff?*

HOLBROOK
CHRONICLES
CHAPTER ONE
STORY AND ART ORIGINAL BY
MARK A. NELSON
LETTERING
RICK TAYLOR
EARTH: 5338 A.D. HAS BECOME A DESERT PLANET. THE PLANET RAVAGED ALMOST COMPLETELY STERILE BY THE LAST SEVEN WARS. VELTUN AND HIS ALIEN RAIDERS ARE NOW TRYING TO TAKE THE LAST OF IT'S RESOURCES, INSTEAD, WATER, AND PEOPLE THE PEOPLE OF EARTH ARE NOW BECOMING FOOD FOR THEIR LARDER.
© 1988 Mark A. Nelson

The title page from a story first published in JUST IMAGINE #11 (1984).

MARK: Um, there are *elements* to that. Again, I haven't actually started writing it so I'm not positive about that. I mean the Phantom *is* an heroic fantasy, I'm not sure how far I want to take, or how far I *should* take, the idea that — when you get right down to it, it is an interesting kind of colonial white man's fantasy, to be down there being the one man who can solve problems.

JULIA: *Does this story in any way relate to Bob Geldof in real life?*

MARK: No, except in the general sense.

JULIA: *In what he's trying to do.*

MARK: There's a story about someone who's ripping off the food that they're try-

ALIENS

THEY'RE HERE.

ALIENS 1988 TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

"My life is an example of the American way."

ing to take out there. There's a story — have you heard about **Diane Fossey**, who was murdered taking care of the great apes down there?

DAK: *Yeah.*

MARK: They've made a movie about her, and I'm doing a story — I'm not doing the **Diane Fossey** story. I made up my own person — a story about how the great apes are being wiped out, and something the Phantom can do with that. And there's a couple of pirate stories in there, because the Phantom's cool, he handles pirates still, and that kind of thing

DAK: *Is the Phantom stuck in Africa or is he international? Does he ever hop on a plane and go to other parts of the world?*

MARK: Well, he will. He has a hangout in the southwest of the United States somewhere, a plateau, and I think he has a castle somewhere in Europe that he hangs out in, and then he has the Skull Cave and a couple of other hangouts in Africa. So yeah, he's pretty international, but I think the scope of the series is going to stick *pretty* intensely down in Africa.

JULIA: *You should talk to Ted Boonthanakit, artist of MICRA, because he lived and was brought up in Africa*

MARK: Really?

JULIA: *His father was a diplomat for . . .*

DAK: *Thailand. He was born in Thailand and grew up in Kenya and has a lot of experience living over there and all that sort of stuff*

MARK: Great. I plan to do an enormous amount of research once I get into this, because I want it to be as *reasonably* accurate as possible. Now it *is* a fantasy land of sorts, they do not live in real countries -- THE PHANTOM that **Lee Falk** created lives in its entire own world.

DAK: *How much input does Lee Falk have?*

MARK: **Lee Falk** has, as far as I know, complete approval.

DAK: *Have you met him or talked to him?*

MARK: I haven't *met* him; he read all my outlines, though, and thought they were fine. I suppose if he hadn't thought they were fine we would have had to talk. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *He must be getting up there.*

MARK: He must be in his 80s, and he's still doing MANDRAKE and still doing THE PHANTOM strip. I think it's great, and I think it's great too that he has that much control

DAK: *Yeah, control, that's what it's all about.*

MARK: I hope when I'm 80 I can go, "Son, bring those outlines *here!*" *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, let's switch over to the other Mark and get his back story — we'll travel back in the Fredmobile to the wee early days when he was making rude comments in high school. The last time we hung out was 1969, wasn't it?*

MAN: We've met each other at a couple of cons since then.

DAK: *Yeah, true, and you were in New York once.*

MAN: That's right, I was out at the College Art Association and you stopped by.

DAK: *And I took you up and introduced you to Archie Goodwin at Epic — who didn't have the common sense to do anything with him, folks.* (Laughter.) *Hi, Archie. Anyway —*

MAN: In the back door and out, yeah. Okay, well, '69. . graduated high school later than that, went on to the Cleveland Institute of Art, finished my BFA there in drawing with a minor in printmaking.

DAK: *Your father, Robert A. Nelson, was art professor at the University of North Dakota.*

MAN: UND.

DAK: *Me and my high school friend, Dwight Zimmerman, who now edits all our comics and also scripts and edits for Marvel —*

MAN: Yeah, you two used to come over and be tortured by this big guy with a beard who used to go, *(gravelly voice)* "Don't walk in the living room. I'm watching TV!" *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *And who also had a bound set of WEIRD TALES magazine.*

MAN: And AMAZING STORIES and all the ASTOUNDINGs

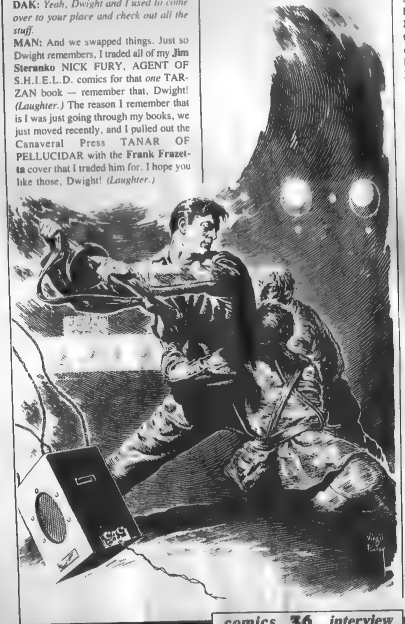
THE PHANTOM comes to DC Comics . . . Scripts by Verheiden (Luke McDonnell illustrating).

The Phantom ® 1989 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved. Published under license by DC Comics, Inc

"Whether the continuity is contra-

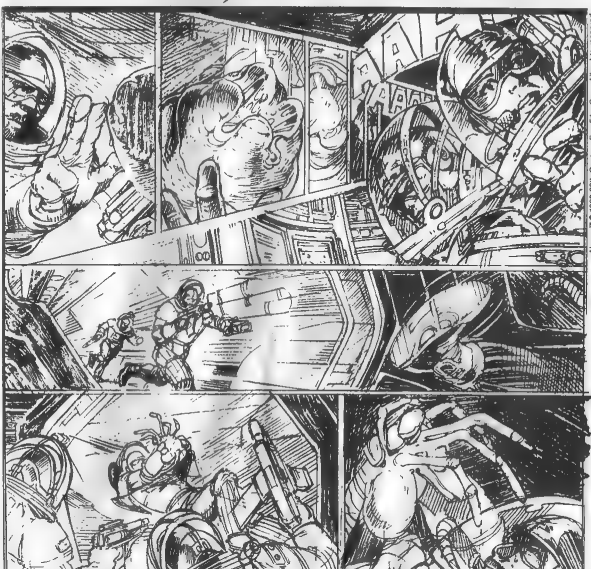
DAK: *Virgil Finlay originals.*
MAN: Some original artwork, yeah.
DAK: *It's amazing the stuff that was in North Dakota in those days.*
MAN: Well, that was — gosh, I can't remember his name now, the original fan —
DAK: *Dunkleburger.*
MAN: Walter Dunkleburger. He passed away, I'm sorry to say, then Ernie's Bookstore got all that stuff and we bought a lot of it there. It was an amazing collection. We were lucky to get ahold of all that great old art and everything else, so we did have a *good* science-fiction collection. That's how we sort of met.
DAK: *Yeah, Dwight and I used to come over to your place and check out all the stuff.*
MAN: And we swapped things. Just so Dwight remembers, I traded all of my **Jim Steranko** NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. comics for that *one* TARZAN book — remember that, Dwight! *(Laughter.)* The reason I remember that is I was just going through my books, we just moved recently, and I pulled out the Canaveral Press TANAR OF PELLUCIDAR with the **Frank Frazetta** cover that I traded him for. I hope you like those, Dwight! *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *Actually, Dave's got them all now.*
DAK: *I just did a swap with Dwight.*
MAN: I want 'em back, I want 'em back! *(Laughter.)* Then after graduating I went to Morgan State College for a year, then my parents moved to Cleveland, Ohio, and my dad started teaching at Cleveland State University, so I went to the Cleveland Institute of Art for four years. I met my wife, Anita; she's now an illustrator, at the time she was an enamelist and a lithographer.
DAK: *A what?*
MAN: An enamelist and —
DAK: *Enamelist. oh. They coat*



refrigerators with that substance, right?
MAN: Yeah. It was a pretty lucrative business, refrigerator coating. *(Laughter.)* That was a fun thing. We met at the Art Institute over a lithostone, we proceeded to get married, and then I went to graduate school and finished my graduate degree — and that's when we met-in New York when I was at the CAA conference.
DAK: *What year did you come out to New York?*
MAN: Oh, God, that must have been . . . '76 I think.
DAK: *No. it was later than that. I had basically conquered Marvel at that time.*
MAN: Dave had *basically* conquered Marvel. *(Laughter.)*
DAK: *That was probably '79 or '80.*
MAN: I'm wondering whether I was teaching at Northern or not when I came out.
DAK: *Yes.*
MAN: Okay, I was, then it would be later. I graduated in '76. . . or '78, I can't remember now. *(Laughter.)* I've been at Northern for ten years so I guess it would be '78; I graduated in '78, got the job at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, and I've been teaching there ever since. Then I got started doing comics again. I was just doodling for myself and I stuck 'em in a portfolio under the bed, and then finally my wife yelled at me, "You should *do* something with all of that stuff." So I started with JUST IMAGINE COMICS, submitted some things to them, and that was **Denny** and **Jenny Mesinger**. Then I met **Hilary Barta** at a comics convention, and then met **Joe Staton**, who knew my work, but who said, "Come back when you learn how to use a brush." He didn't really say that. *(Laughter.)* I did sample pages for STARSLAYER, with Joe as art director there, and he sort of got me into First and I did STARSLAYER with Hilary, and then I started pencilling CLONEZONE, and inking CLONEZONE —
DAK: *Which was the backup in NEXUS.*
MAN: And then moved to BADGER — it was the only comic book that got more hate mail than any other thing. *(Laughter.)* I think there was *one* positive letter in the two or three years I did it.
DAK: *And that was from Mom, right.*
MAN: Mom? No —
DAK: *She wrote in a hate letter?* (Laughter.)
MAN: Some blind guy with a dog wrote in, "I love that stuff." *(Laughter.)* So then from there I did some work for Eclipse, the AIRBOY stuff, the AIRBOY backup. I did a horror story with **Chuck Dixon**, did a couple of other horror stories and

dicted or not, who cares. I don't."



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Mark Nelson pencils from Dark Horse's ALIENS.

some other things, then moved on to. . . who else did I work for? I've just been all over the place, that's the problem. One of those fans that follows your work — you know, you get *one* of those people — came up with a stack of, like, my life history one day. I was at a convention and he wanted me to sign this stuff, and you go, "Oh, my God, somebody actually *bought* this!" I just can't remember all of this stuff, it's too diversified.

And then a funny thing happened. Mike **Baron** wrote a spoof on GODZILLA, called LORDZIRA, and then **Randy Stradley** called me from Dark Horse and said they were doing the new GODZILLA book, the new one that **Steve Bissette** was working on, and asked if I would do a pin-up page. At that time everybody thought all I could draw was funny animals, so I did that one GODZILLA pin-up page and both Randy and Mike liked it and asked if I'd like to do the book — because **Steve Bissette** was just going to draw the first two or three — and I just said great.

JULIA: *I find it amazing that people — I mean, I've seen your ALIENS stuff and I haven't seen your funny animal stuff — I find it amazing that people would only think you could draw funny animals.*

MAN: You get pegged. People sort of go, *(wimpy voice)* "Well, all he can do is the funny animal stuff." All you can do is this or that. I have that problem sometimes with art directors. When you're an illustrator you go out and if they don't see *exactly* in the portfolio what — if they get a job that calls for a purple rhinoceros with pink polka dots, dancing in a tutu on top

"We're not adapting the movies. I made it clear that I wasn't interested in doing an adaptation."

of a Snickers bar, if you haven't got that in your portfolio you can forget it, they don't think you can draw it. *(Laughter.)* So you have that kind of problem sometimes, so everybody sort of pegged me as a funny animal guy.

The funniest thing was that I asked to take a break from CLONEZONE — I said I needed a break because I was doing the Eclipse stuff — and they gave me a couple of months off at First, which was very gracious of them, and they went looking for people to replace me. They picked up a copy of SILVERWING and said, "Look at this guy, he draws animals, he'd be a good guy to replace Nelson." It was my comic book. *(Laughter.)* They almost asked me to do a fill-in issue for myself — you want to catch up, why don't you do a fill-in issue. *(Laughter.)* And then, as I said, I did the GODZILLA piece, Randy called out and said they really liked that, and then the GODZILLA piece ran into some trouble, so then they went to printing the manga comic.

Then they called me up and said, "Look, we're optioning for ALIENS, would you be interested in doing it?" So they sent me a sample script, I did three pages of storytelling and continuity, and one big black full-inked piece — which actually is the cover for #1 — and they sent that to 20th Century-Fox and they seemed to like it and enjoy it, so then I got roped into ALIENS and then I met Mark.

DAK: *Did you see the movies?*

MAN: Yeah.

DAK: *Did you like them?*

MAN: Nah. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, of course I liked them. The first one is just tremendous, it's probably the *best* horror movie ever made. The second one is pretty much solid action from the word go, so you've got two different kinds of things, each movie is a different entity. Everybody always asks which movie I liked better, but each movie is a different thing. If you're in the mood for a real tense horror movie, then the first one is tremendous. If you want slam-bam, whack-'em-up, slap-'em-down, shoot-'em-up action, then the second one is the best.

JULIA: *I have to say — this is just completely beside the point — but I think Mark Verheiden looks like John Cleese.* (Laughter.) *He does.*

DAK: *That is true.*

MARK: John will be happy to hear that. *(Laughter.)*

MAN: Why don't you do like in A FISH CALLED WANDA, do the nude dance here?

MARK: Put the hat over myself. *(Laughter.)*

Space suit designs (by Nelson).

JULIA: *The man from the Ministry of Silly Walks.*

MARK: Yeah, the Ministry

MAN: *(To recorder.)* It's only fair to warn you, we all *are* naked here. We just finished with the Crisco Twister and that's why the interview is so lax. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: Six beers and we'll do anything, right.

MAN: Yeah! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *As one of our former editors suggested to T.M. Maple, we need Molson enemas here.* (Laughter.)

MAN: Molson, *Canadian* beer — get out of here.

MARK: Guinness

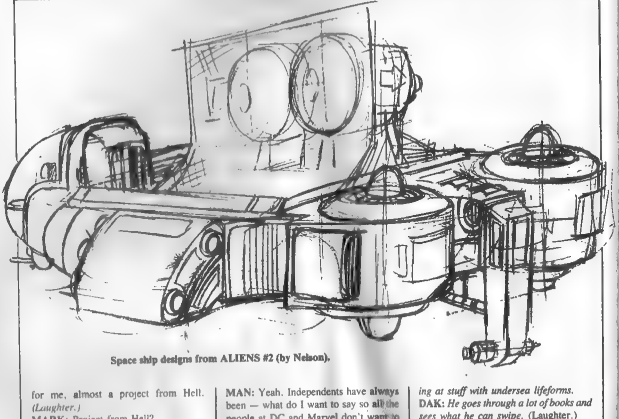
MAN: Guinness, yeah, there you go — get a good English *warm* beer.

JULIA: *But the mind boggles with Moosehead enemas.* (Laughter.)

DAK: *So okay,* now *we're at this crucial juncture. Did you guys ever meet, talk to each other — were you even aware of each other's existence?*

MAN: I would call ALIENS a beginning

"I don't even read the scripts, and he doesn't



Space ship designs from ALIENS #2 (by Nelson).

for me, almost a project from Hell. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: Project from Hell?

MAN: Well now . . . Okay, it's been a year since we met.

MARK: We met at the San Diego con last year.

MAN: Yeah, last year, and it was supposed to be announced in August. I had done the intro artwork and it was supposedly going to be announced at the con last year, and actually you didn't get *started* writing the script until what?

MARK: October, November

MAN: And I didn't see anything until almost February.

MARK: There was basically — I don't know if there was a problem or anything — but I think negotiations with Fox . . . this just *happens*, this is not a *negative*, I don't want to present it as a negative, but the negotiations just took a while to firm up, as things do in this way. Also — you know, I'm not privy to the actual negotiations, I can't be sure — but I'm sure there was some reticence on Fox's part with going with a company like Dark Horse as opposed to a DC or a Marvel.

MAN: Yeah.

MARK: But my understanding was they saw what Dark Horse was doing and really got behind the Dark Horse *mood*, or whatever Dark Horse does, and decided to give them a shot

MAN: Yeah. Independents have always been — what do I want to say so all the people at DC and Marvel don't want to cut our heads off and stuff 'em full of garlic and bury 'em apart from the other parts of our body — ? *(Laughter.)* My problem is that a lot of people look at *my* work . . . the comment has always been made, "Your work is not commercial." You had that problem too, trying to fit me into some sort of a niche or something that would work with the kind of visuals in what I do.

DAK: *Yeah. For years I thought, "Geez, I'm publishing comics, I know Mark Nelson, I know of him, but what can I do with him?" It's difficult sometimes when you know somebody's incredibly good but you don't know how to use them. It's like John Cleese is good at some things but probably not too good at playing Tarzan, you know.*

MAN: He's not too bad at imitating **Verheiden.** *(Laughter.)*

MARK: He could just take my place.

MAN: He could do a guest signing. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Better yet, he could sign the guest check.*

JULIA: *Something I wanted to ask you about, Mark, you said to me yesterday that when you want to get really* into *doing art you go through a lot of books and you find that your creativity is stimulated by looking at stuff with undersea lifeforms.*

DAK: *He goes through a lot of books and sees what he can swipe.* (Laughter.)

MAN: Yeah, yeah — I think I'll draw like **Hal Foster** this week. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *I wondered if you scuba dived or did anything like that, or what it was that —*

MAN: I grew up in a landlocked area. In North Dakota the *rivers* are like what normal people call creeks, they might have been all of ten feet deep and —

DAK: *If you've ever been to the men's bathroom and seen those long urinals like the ones they have here at the convention hall, that's considered a river in North Dakota.*

MAN: Yeah, that's a fast-moving *deep* river. *(Laughter.)* Fish fascinate me mainly because there's no sense of gravity; you know, if you have a tropical fish it goes up, it goes down, it goes sideways, it goes all different kinds of ways. But I also have — and Mark knows this, everyone else that knows me knows this — I have a big dinosaur fixation.

DAK: *Yes.*

MAN: One of my favorite things is the prehistoric fish the coelacanth, a lobe-fin fish which they thought had been extinct for millions and millions of years and then they caught one off the coast of Africa in the '40s. But I think to me the sea has always been a really interesting thing, it

look at my pictures, so it's been great so far."

has the color, it has the fluidity, it has the certain type of movement that I find very . . . I mean I looked at **Paul Chadwick's** CONCRETE, too, there was that real . . . I don't know, going back to home, that sort of thing.

MARK: I don't know what it is with Paul, it's like the mystery of the sea as well as everything else.

MAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *I have done some scuba diving, it was completely different from what I expected it to be. It's almost holy down there; the only thing I can relate it to is when you're taken into a cathedral as a small child, that awe. It's like how you would imagine if you went on the moon, because all the normal laws don't exist.*

MAN: Yeah, like the first time you walk into that room where they have that 175 foot ceiling, there is that awe, you kind of just become this little tiny thing.

MARK: It's an interesting thing, too — getting back to ALIENS a little bit — that's what *scares* you, you know.

MAN: Yeah.

MARK: Fear is kind of what ALIENS is about. When I was young my parents had a boat and we went out on a lake — I still remember this so clearly — and we'd bought those masks, you know. I had been out having a great time swimming for weeks, then I put on this mask and looked down in the water and all I saw was this *abyss*! It was the most terrifying thing I had ever seen and I had to get out of the water. I couldn't *see* anything anymore. It didn't matter when you weren't *supposed* to see it, but when you put the mask on and you are supposed to and all you see is this abyss — maybe I was into the Creature from the Black Lagoon and thought he was going to come and get me — but it was the *scariest* thing I had ever seen. So I think the sea has a fear thing to it too, that it's unknown even though it's seven-tenths of the planet or whatever

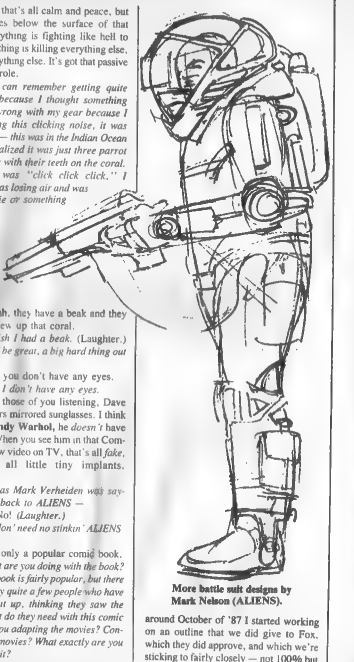
DAK: *Yeah.*

MAN: Of course they don't tell you this, parents used to rub bacon fat on them and throw them in there and watch the crappies go for 'em. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *Like the piranhas.*

MAN: But it's like the whole thing when JAWS came out, it just *terrified* you because the sea has also got the thing where you don't hear anything. When you're scuba diving or snorkeling, you're down there and somebody goes overhead in a boat and you don't really know where it's coming from — or you'll turn around and there's something right in your face, a fish or a turtle or something, just right up on you. So there is that sort of incredible beauty that's all calm and peace, but three inches below the surface of that water everything is fighting like hell to live, everything is killing everything else, eating everything else. It's got that passive yet active role.

JULIA: *I can remember getting quite hysterical because I thought something had gone wrong with my gear because I kept hearing this clicking noise, it was really loud — this was in the Indian Ocean and I realized it was just three parrot fish feeding with their teeth on the coral. The noise was "click click click," I thought I was losing air and was going to die or something*



More battle suit designs by Mark Nelson (ALIENS).

MAN: Yeah, they have a beak and they can just chew up that coral.

DAK: *I wish I had a beak.* (Laughter.) *That would be great, a big hard thing out there —*

MAN: But you don't have any eyes.

DAK: *No, I don't have any eyes.*

MAN: For those of you listening, Dave always wears mirrored sunglasses. I think he's like **Andy Warhol,** he *doesn't* have any eyes. When you see him in that Comics Interview video on TV, that's all *fake*, those are all little tiny implants. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *But as Mark Verheiden was saying, to get back to ALIENS —*

MARKs: No! *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *We don' need no stinkin' ALIENS* (Laughter.)

MAN: It's only a popular comic book.

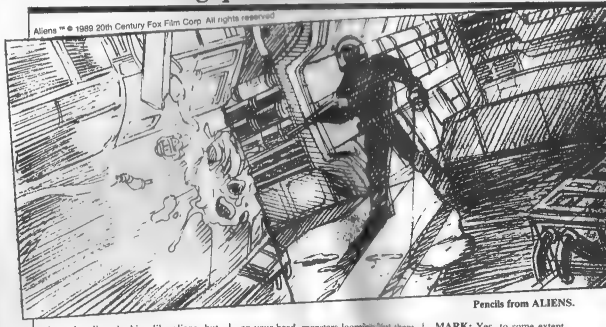
DAK: *What are you doing with the book? I mean the book is fairly popular, but there are probably quite a few people who have not picked it up, thinking they saw the movie, what do they need with this comic book. Are you adapting the movies? Continuing the movies? What exactly are you doing with it?*

MARK: We're not adapting the movies. When I got into the project I made it clear that I wasn't particularly interested in doing an adaptation. I'm not saying I will *never* do adaptations, but in this case I said, "Look, if it's not a new story, if it's not something new, what's the point." Plus I think they've already been adapted, so why bother. The idea going into it was let's do a new story, let's come up with something that we feel comfortable with and that Fox feels comfortable with. So around October of '87 I started working on an outline that we did give to Fox, which they did approve, and which we're sticking to fairly closely — not 100% but pretty close. They were very happy with it.

I might say right here that we've had very little problems. People have this image of big movie studios just butchering everything you ever do — that's been my experience in my movies — *(Laughter.)* But on *this* project Fox has been extremely supportive, in fact has given me the kind of latitude that writers dream about.

MAN: And artistically they've been really good, too. They were really concerned

"Let's ask the big question here, Dave: Are comics art?"



Pencils from ALIENS.

about the aliens looking like aliens, but we've been able to introduce new things.

MARK: I think if you look at past efforts to adapt the movies, not to put them down, but I think Mark's version of the aliens by far is certainly the closest graphic representation of those creatures you're going to see.

MAN: Thank you, **Geiger.** *(Laughter.)*

MARK: Thank you, H.R. And I hope the stories are the kind of thing that are jumping off from the films but not just slavishly *copying* the films.

DAK: *Well, I have a double question here.*

MARKs: Okay.

DAK: *One is, how do you keep the fear level up? The other is, are they planning further movies, and what happens if you go off in a direction that's different from what they're going off in?*

MARK: Well, I'll answer the second part of that first, which is I'm sure they're planning new films. Whether the continuity is contradicted or not, who cares. I don't. I can't let that bother me, and I don't. I don't think the people at 20th Century-Fox are letting it bother them.

To go back to the first part, how do you keep the fear up, that becomes a very personal thing about what do you think is scary — and **Mark Nelson** is *very* scary.

MAN: In a bathrobe, absolutely terrifying. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: The funny thing about that is — and Mark and I have talked about this, and we've talked about it with Dark Horse — the two films are two very separate entities. The first film is a very claustrophobic, creepy, water-dripping-on-your-head, monsters-looming-but-there type of film — it's very scary. The second film is basically a war movie where instead of Japanese or Germans it's the aliens. They're two completely separate types of films.

MAN: I agree completely.

MARK: I like both of them. I have this sort of moderate half-assed theory that comics are able to replicate the creepy, scary, dripping-water type feeling perhaps a little better than the all-out action, because comics don't move and movies do.

MAN: Right.

MARK: So I would say the first three issues of ALIENS are really going for this really *frightening* "what-is-going-on-in-people's-heads-is-horrible" type mood. The later issues are going to get into just complete all-out action, so actually I'm trying to kind of transcend both. So as far as the writing of it, I guess what I'm really into is trying to convey that claustrophobic fear. I suppose we're actually going a little further than the **Ridley Scott** film — I'm not saying that in a good or bad way — but doing a lot of things. . . Well, what I think is the scariest thing on earth is not somebody's guts being ripped out, but the thoughts going through the mind of somebody doing that. What possible thoughts are inside these creatures' heads? What is motivating people to do very strange things? I suppose as a writer what's scary to me is to try to come up with some understanding of these very strange people.

DAK: *Are you doing that, are you getting into the aliens' heads?*

MARK: Yes, to some extent

DAK: *The movies don't, the aliens are completely unknown.*

MARK: Yeah, to some extent. The aliens I don't see as being all that bright.

DAK: *Well, what if they were real intelligent?*

MARK: They're not that smart.

DAK: *I just wonder about that. Is there any real comprehension at all of what they're doing?*

MAN: They're parasites, their whole sense of life is to just reproduce, protect themselves, eat

DAK: *And climb the corporate ladder.* (Laughter)

MARK: Sell comics.

MAN: Yeah, get big, get tall *(Laughter.)*

MARK: I think the aliens are probably about as bright as reasonably bright dogs. Like a dog or a cat, if there's food inside of a building and there's a way to get in, through a duct or through a tunnel or through some hole in the wall, they'll find it. I mean they're not stupid but they wouldn't use the doorknob except by accident, to me they're about that bright. So the aliens have all this power and there's millions of them; it's a pretty vicious critter when cornered.

MAN: It depends on whether you want your throat torn out or your Achilles' tendon

MARK: Right. *right.*

DAK: *Well, how long can you sustain this kind of thing? Can you keep finding stories in aliens preying upon humans and humans fighting back?*

MAN: Well, as far as I'm concerned we're doing a six-issue mini-series that's

"ALIENS is a war movie where instead of Japanese or Germans it's the aliens."

one story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, period. Whether we take it from there or not I haven't really thought about.

MARK: When the time comes that's a river we'll cross. Another thing that I want to bring up, a lot of people have got preconceived ideas of what they feel an alien should be, what this story should be, what that should be. I think the thing that you have to do is look at the book and say, "This is one person's idea of what we can do with things." I think there's a difference between a subjective and an objective criticism, you know what I mean. I've read a lot of criticism on the book and everyone goes, "Wonderful art but the story should be like this, this person should be like this, this person should be like that." Well, that's fine, but on the other hand I think you have to stop and say, "Okay, this is the way that Mark perceives it, let's proceed along those tracks." Give it a break, you know. People just *jump* to conclusions too quickly.

JULIA: *Mike Richardson said that you were getting letters from people saying that they thought that the plot should have been so-and-so, or they would have done it this way —*

MARK: Yeah.

JULIA: *— including movie critics and so on who really reviewed your work against what they would have done rather than reviewing your work for what it was.*

MARK: Right, that's exactly what's happening. I walked into this project *knowing* there was a possibility of that happening, but I had no idea how *big* ALIENS is in some people's minds, how important.

MAN: On the first cover, someone called me up and said I drew the aliens wrong. I go, "What do you mean?" "Well, you know, the second thumb is not on the cover and they only have one thumb." You know, you kind of say to yourself, "Well, I guess every alien is just alike, just as every human being looks alike, we all look exactly alike."

DAK: *I don't have eyes.*

MAN: Yeah, except Dave doesn't have eyes, and I don't have a moustache and Mark does, and he looks like **John Cleese.** But it's that whole thing. If you go and look at the first movie and get the pictures and look at the alien and how **Geiger** developed it, when you look at the second movie the arms are different, they lost the thorn on the elbow. So I tend to go and adapt *both*. I go and pick out the pieces I like. And people come up and say, "How come you're not using the rifles that were in the movie?" It's because you

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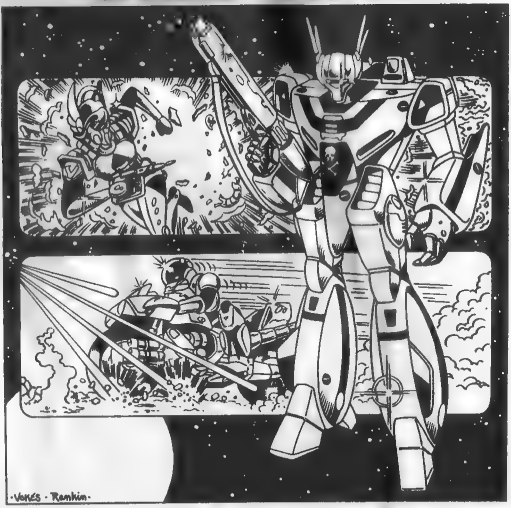

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"We're talking about *Empire of the Dinosaur*— by Lofficier."

want to add some of your own ideas a little bit. It's ten years later, maybe technology might advance a *little* bit, they might develop a different rifle or come up with a whole different suit.

JULIA: *Newt is now eighteen.*

MAN: That's another thing, someone wrote in and said Hicks' hair is white in the comic book but it was brown in the movie. Well, it's a black-and-white comic book. *(Laughter.)* You know, Newt's hair is dark in the comic book but it was light in the movie. Well, how many kids do you know when they're small they have light hair and as they get older their hair gets darker. So . . . I mean there's criticisms that I think are *valid* criticisms, and then I think there are criticisms where people are just trying to nitpick.

DAK: *That are blatantly anal retentive.* (Laughter.)

MARK: There are some other criticisms that to me actually kind of speak to — there was one I couldn't believe — to this worldview some people have, that I just do *not* subscribe to whatsoever. One guy was saying, or suggesting, that Hicks shouldn't have mental problems because by then they will have a pill you can take and no one will have mental problems. *(Laughter.)* And by the same token we had a person who complained that Newt at eighteen is this scarred-up creeped-out girl, because hey, she was this tough survivor when she was eight years old, running around keeping alive from the aliens. Well, you don't think that would scar up an eight-year-old girl a little bit, you don't think that might play *some* role in her development, that she might be a little bit screwed up from that?

MAN: And on top of that she's been removed from that environment.

MARK: And she's being drugged by these people who are giving her a pill they should have given Hicks, I guess. That speaks to this *faith* in technology that I find appalling! Some people seem to think — soapbox time — that you can run the earth into the gutter and some scientist is going to invent some machine that's going to make it all better. You know, if we have acid rain and mental problems and —

JULIA: *Plus they're basing arguments on assumptions.*

MARK: Yeah. Science is going to rescue us? ALIENS is absolutely not about that. ALIENS, in my view, is that science is *not* going to rescue us, we have to rescue ourselves. Science is not going to come up with the pill or the secret machine or the box or the tool that's going to rescue you. I hope they do, that would be great, that would solve a lot of problems, but —

Cover sheet from Nelson's THE SILVERWING COLLECTION.

MAN: But we'd all be vegetables probably.

MARK: Yeah, we'd all be lobotomized But to criticize it from that point of view is just absurd.

MAN: It's just like when people watch a movie and stop somewhere and say, "Well, if I would have done it . . ." I just say, "Boy, now there's a really intelligent critic." They're leaving out the basis of what criticism ought to be about, an objective look, when they run around doing these little subjective things. It's like the old attitude, there's two ways of doing things, there's my way and the wrong way. I think that's the really *sad* thing, especially in comics.

I found a CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN drawn by **Bob Brown**, it was just *incredible* because it was so much fun. It had no relationship to science, they were fooling around with this laser, it goes *brrp* to the moon and all of a sudden this creature comes down to the earth, he has a giant jetpack and burns holes in the ground, then they find some alien that tells them how to defeat it — this is real fun enjoyable stuff. We're so involved in technology now that everything has to be *explained*, you can't have some of that fun and excitement.

Sometimes you have to do that suspension of disbelief, you know. I think you've just got to say, "Okay, this is one person's view of what could happen," and run with it for awhile, see what the hell it's all about. Don't always pull back and say, "Well, if I . . ." One thing about a movie, you know, is they've *got* you for two hours. You pick up a comic book, flip flip flip flip flip flip, or you actually sit down and read it. So I think sometimes when you're reading you have to remember comics are entertainment and go with it.

MARK: And I will also say from a story standpoint that with ALIENS it's one story over six issues, it's being serialized, so you've got to read all six issues. People are saying, "How come we don't see this character, how come this isn't there, how

"To a new person coming to *The American*, it's basically a story

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Early science fiction/fantasy/horror strip by Mark A. Nelson.

come you're not dealing with the androids?'' Well, I'm sorry. If you went to the first movie you did not see 20 minutes of aliens in the first ten minutes. You build, it's a dramatic thing, and I'm writing it like you would see a movie. Being serialized becomes a problem, but you have to understand you've got to read all six for it to make sense.

DAK: *That didn't stop Charles Dickens.*

MAN: Right, and I can only draw so fast. As the artist I find myself saying some of the same things, I want to draw this or I want to draw that, and Mark says no, we've got to develop this and we've got to develop that, and in the long run he is right. As the visual person I get excited and stimulated about doing certain kinds of things, so we have the ongoing —

MARK: The yin and yang

MAN: Yeah, the yin and yang. That's what comics are, a collaborative effort. He writes a script, I read it and the top of my head comes off — *(Laughter.)* And then he has to calm me down and we work it all out. We've gotten along really well.

MARK: I don't think we've had any problems working together.

JULIA: *Is it a monthly book?*

MAN: I don't know, I don't even read the scripts. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: That makes it a lot easier.

MAN: And he doesn't look at my pictures, so it's been great so far

DAK: *That should fit right in with the mainstream books.* (Laughter.)

MAN: It's bi-monthly.

MARK: We're looking at bi-monthly

JULIA: *So it'll be out over the span of a year.*

MAN: Yeah.

JULIA: *Are there plans to collect it, all six issues into an album?*

MARK: I would imagine.

MAN: Yeah, I hope so.

MARK: I don't think it's specific right now, but I think a collection will . . . in fact, I prefer people to get it in a collection . . . don't put that in. *(Laughter.)* But I would prefer people to see it as a whole, rather than as just serialized issues.

DAK: *They should buy them all.*

MARK: Yeah, the *proper* way to see it is in one big lump.

DAK: *I did that with DARK KNIGHT.*

JULIA: *And WATCHMEN, I didn't read it at all, and then read all twelve issues at one time.*

MAN: Oh, a lot of people got in big arguments. I mean you would go to a convention and people would be arguing about who the killer was. I picked up the book and just said, ''I don't really care. **Alan Moore** is going to lead us down a path and give us something at the end.'' To be the guy who's the first to guess this and that, I mean that's not what he's really writing about. He's writing about the relationships of the people and about how all these people came together and what happened to them. He could have taken it *hundreds* of different ways.

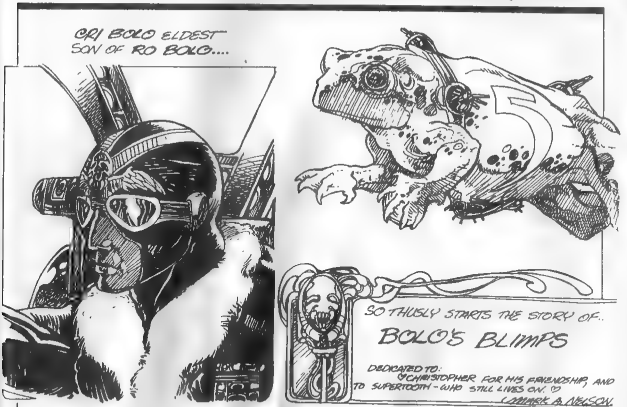
MARK: That's why they hire **Alan Moore** to write these, because he takes you down a road that you couldn't go on yourself. That's theoretically what we *all* do when we write comics, or do anything; we're taking you down a path that *your* mind couldn't necessarily take you down. Not that our path is the ''right'' path or necessarily a *''better''* path than anyone else's, but it's a path you wouldn't see otherwise unless we sat down and did this work.

MAN: That's actually sort of the definition of the artist in some ways — so I guess this means I have to draw more talking heads and quit whining and moaning, huh?

MARK: And I'll put in more caves and aliens and water planets. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, let's talk about some separate projects you two guys have done. What about THE AMERICAN?*

about a guy who bought into the American military dream."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BOLO'S BLIMPS
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LOMARK & NELSON

MARK: THE AMERICAN is an ongoing series for Dark Horse, **Grant Miehm** is now pencilling it — he's a very talented guy in Canada who's done some work for DC — and he's doing a great job picking up from where **Chris Warner** left off. THE AMERICAN is kind of my baby. I created it and have been doing it for a while now, and I'm taking it in some kind of fun directions. Basically it's taking a costumed heroic character and — this is a kind of cliche in comics now — but trying to do it quasi-realistically, and actually kind of having fun with the things that really *bother* me about current comic books

DAK: *Well, let's pretend that I've never seen one; what is it, what is THE AMERICAN?*

MAN: It's **Chris Warner,** the greatest **Elvis** impersonator ever, who drew it.

MARK: The first four issues.

MAN: Don't be cruel, Chris. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: To a new person coming to THE AMERICAN, it's basically a story about a guy who sort of picked up and bought into the American military dream and became part of a commando squad that was formed by the United States government back in the '50s. Basically it's been a suicide squad of these guys they call The American, they've all been plastic-surgeoned into looking the same. Our focal American person got disgusted with people being killed left and right and no one ever thought twice about it, so he basically blows the lid off it. The first four issues is a continued story where a reporter and this last American kind of end the conspiracy of The American people. From there what I'm doing is taking the reporter and the American into different areas.

DAK: *Are you familiar with CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY? Some of the themes sound similar.*

MARK: No. Someone's mentioned that but, actually, I've never read one — sorry, CAPTAIN CONFEDERACY guy. So that's THE AMERICAN, we're continuing that, and basically I'm just having a lot of fun with it, taking it in the directions that I feel like taking it in. It's kind of drawn from today's headlines.

DAK: *Didn't I hear something about some big motion picture or something?*

MARK: It was optioned by a lady named **Bonnie Burns,** who produced the WIL SHRINER SHOW, and a guy named **Jerry Zucker,** who directed RUTHLESS PEOPLE and a movie called AIRPLANE. They theoretically are developing it for a live action TV series. The writers strike just ended as we speak, so we may be talking about this next week.

DAK: *Would you be writing it?*

MARK: I would *love* to write it, I would love to be involved in some way, whether I am or not we don't know. I certainly am going to push to have some kind of creative involvement in it. Movies *are* my background, I feel that I'm relatively competent to do that. So I'm doing that, and also PREDATOR for Dark Horse, which will be a four-issue color series in March 1989, drawn by **Chris Warner.**

JULIA: *So your graduate school may pay off after all.*

MARK: My graduate school made me very wary of the movie business, and of people promising you things that you cannot be guaranteed they're going to give. Graduate school for me was learning to not take things at face value, and to also try to make sure you're reasonably protected with everyone you work with, even best of friends.

DAK: *You never know when they'll turn into Dark Somebody.*

MARK: Yeah. I learned to be cynical, I guess.

DAK: *Well, what about SILVERWING and all these other things?*

MAN: *(Snore.)*

MARK: I put him to sleep, put Mark to sleep! *(Laughter.)*

"All the rules are meant to be broken and changed."

MAN: Well, right now with Dark Horse what's going to happen next is there's a project that we're just talking about right now, EMPIRE OF THE DINOSAUR That would be based in 1914, written by **Jean-Marc Lofficier** and **Randy Lofficier,** and illustrated by me. Basically, the premise of the whole thing is there's an alternate world in which dinosaurs become the dominant form of life, and they're sort of at the Victorian era the same as we were at the turn of the century, but they're a *little* bit more advanced in some ways. They break through a portal and come to the southwest United States, so what's going to happen is instead of having World War I in Europe we'll have World War I in the southwestern states, man against dinosaur. That's in the talking stages right now.

The other thing that Mike and I are talking about is SILVERWING, which is the *film noir* dinosaur detective. That was originally my concept — actually, the concept started as a spoof on Sherlock Holmes, the first Silverwing drawing was Silverwing standing in a bathrobe, playing the violin, but it has a crank on the side, sort of like those little ukuleles that you got as a kid. So it started out as a comedy and then it got into becoming a hard-boiled detective thing, and that's something that Mike is very interested in *also* for Dark Horse. I'm going to do, hopefully, a couple of short stories for DARK HORSE PRESENTS and see how people react, and if it's positive then that would be another project that I would like to continue.

DAK: *Do you see any similarities with that and the approach they took with WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?*

MAN: ROGER RABBIT, to me, is ultimate camp and everything else, poking fun at things. SILVERWING is more of a hard-boiled detective **Raymond Chandler**-type thing, serious but with a sense of humor about it — even ALIENS has a sense of humor about it.

MARK: Bleak.

MAN: Yeah, bleak humor.

DAK: *So, do you guys have any regrets?*

MARK: I don't have any, things are going pretty well. **Mark Nelson** probably regrets a lot of things.

MAN: But ALIENS is an enormous seller — even if everyone *hates* it, we can laugh all the way to the bank.

MARK: Hopefully.

MAN: Yeah. If Mike is listening: Mike, Mike, get those checks out! *(Laughter.)*

MARK: From that standpoint, I think it's been a good project.

MAN: Yeah. And it's been a different project for me. In a sense, everything I've been doing has been in the background, I've been an inker, I've been doing short stories, I've been doing back-up things. This has really thrown me out into the foreground, you know; and it's been a real commercial property, so more people are seeing some of the stuff I can do. I tend to be hypercritical about my work. I told Randy jokingly that by the time I get issue #6 done I'll finally figure out what I'm doing and start doing a good job.

MARK: We're both hypercritical about our work, that's something we share.

© 1989 M. Verheiden

From THE AMERICAN #7 (Verheiden & Grant Miehm).

MAN: Yeah, it's healthy and it's negative at the same time.

MARK: It can slow you down, but we're trying to do the best book that we can.

MAN: Yeah. That's why I think some people will just have to set aside their personal prejudices and let the book *take* them down a road that's a little bit different. Don't be so quick to dam up the river.

MARK: And I think if they give us a chance they *will* get into it and start judging it on its own merits. It's not the movies.

MAN: It's something completely

Dan Spiegle: "I get up every day and I'm excited to draw."

different.

DAK: *Is there a chance it could* become *the next movie?*

MARK: *(Pause.)* All I can say is that at one point last year Fox did say something like, "Wow, this is really great, we should look at it for the next movie." But that's kind of the equivalent of saying, "Wow, this is really great." It's a nice compliment, but I really doubt it. I understand **William Gibson** is writing the third script, he's a great writer. The direction they're taking it in is a *very* interesting direction, at least in the outline I read, which they say isn't actually the outline they've approved yet. The way he was taking it is really cool.

MAN: **William Gibson** is part of the new cyberpunk science fiction people — for those of you who have to peg people.

MARK: Yeah. He's a very very talented man and his ideas on the aliens are pretty mind-boggling. Actually, they're not *that* different from *some* of the things that Mark and I are doing, but sure different in some ways. *(Laughter.)*

MAN: One thing that we can touch on, too, is that we've been working on a short eight-page story which would be in DARK HORSE PRESENTS, which sort of approaches the queen mother and the queen, hopefully we're going to get into some of the cultural kinds of things of the hive—

MARK: Actually, in the main series I think we'll do quite a bit of that. How do these things interact? They don't *think* necessarily but they have *some* sort of communications system, what is that?

MAN: How do termites communicate? Bees?

MARK: Secretions.

MAN: Dances.

MARK: Vibrations.

MAN: All different kinds of things.

DAK: *And we yell at each other.*

MARK: We beat each other. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Okay, anything we've missed?*

MAN: Well, in issue #3 everyone dies, and issue #6 is going to be all white pages so I can catch up.

MARK: I'm going to draw it. *(Laughter.)* Let's ask the big question here, Dave: Are comics art?

DAK: *No, the big question is: What* is *art?*

MARK: The question is: Who *cares* what is art?

MAN: Art is like describing a cloud, it's something you can see but you'll never grab ahold of it. It really is. No matter what rule you come up with, it can be broken. All the rules are meant to be broken and changed and everything else.

MARK: So art could be considered breaking rules in a lot of ways.

MAN: Yeah. And comic books, like everyone admits that they know who Batman is, they know who Superman is, but it's like that old rite of passage when you're father says, "You're a man now, you don't cry anymore; you don't read comic books anymore because those are for *kids*." But like **Dan Spiegle** said, "I get up every day and I'm excited to draw." That's great, that's what it's all about, you're excited to get up and do it.

MARK: Let's go to dinner!

"You have to know how to handle fans who are going to ask you

PETER: *Do you feel that over the years the professionals have gotten more accustomed to fandom, because there are more conventions and stores and so on, whereas perhaps they were a little wary of these things in the beginning and might not have wanted to participate?*

MIKE: They would if anybody asked, if there was an opportunity and it could be fit into their schedule.

ANN: And there was no PR person there in the beginning to coordinate appearances.

PETER: *Well, what is it where people now, editors and writers and artists, newcomers, in a way they have honed their PR skills for going to conventions and making store appearances and plugging their own product?*

MIKE: We're in show biz. Comics is a public entertainment medium.

PETER: *I read an article recently about how there are various writers of prose who employ media consultants to teach them how to speak and present themselves on television*

MIKE: I was a media consultant; so was Ann.

MIKE GOLD

for the 400th time what's going to happen in next month's issue."

VITAL STATISTICS

Names: Michael Gold, Ann Elizabeth DeLarye-Gold
Place and Date of Birth: (Mike) Chicago, IL, 4 August 1950; (Ann) Chicago, IL, 19 November, 1955
Occupations: (Mike) Director of Development and Senior Editor, DC Comics; (Ann) Vice President, Institute for International Research
Credits: (Both) With others, founded and organized Chicago Comicon, 1976-1986; (Mike) Free-lance writer, reporter, public information officer for Chicago 7 Defense Committee, radio show host and personality, social services worker, Publicity and Public Relations Director for DC Comics, co-founder and editor of First Comics; (Ann) Director of Communications for the Central Educational Network, free-lance writer, various amateur theatrical work
Favorite Authors: (Mike) Damon Runyan, Rex Stout
Favorite Books: (Ann) Anything by Kahil Gibran, I'm ashamed to say, but I love his stuff, it's so beautiful
Favorite Movies: (Mike) THE THIRD MAN BRAZIL (Ann) THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY, THE WIZARD OF OZ
Favorite Principal Means of Having Fun: (Mike) I don't think you can print it (Ann) Reading and exotic bathing
Least Favorite Thing to Do: (Ann) Housework; (Mike) Deadlines
Ultimate Goal in Life: (Mike) Making it through the week alive (Ann) Having an obituary in THE NEW YORK TIMES

ANN: Nobody's come to me from the comics industry, to ask, "How can I better my skills?" I don't think that pros have reached that level yet. It's not like in the music business where suddenly musicians decide they have to look good on camera for the videos.

MIKE: I think we're very close to that.

PETER: *But, without mentioning any names, what do you think are the good ways and the bad ways to present oneself to the public?*

ANN: There's one fundamental rule: this is free advice so take it as a nugget of gold — you have to *enjoy* what you're doing. That can't be faked. If you start from that point you'll be okay, and if you don't start from that point you'll never get there. After that it's all technique and polish and getting used to being up in front of people

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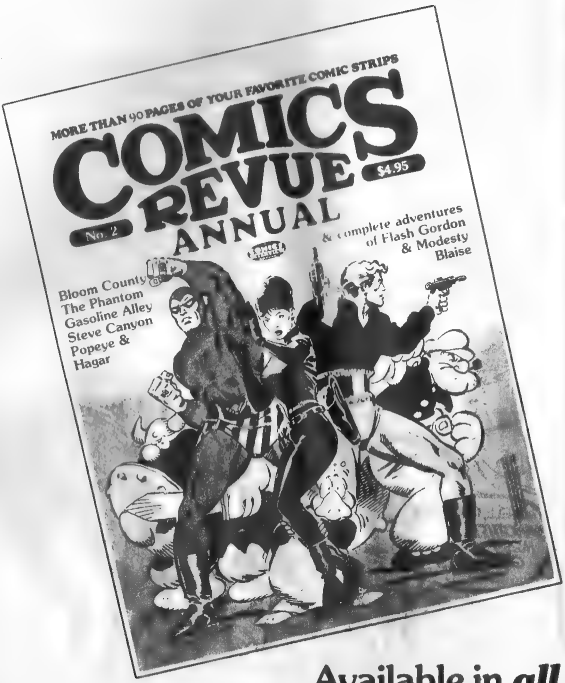

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"If I named names it would probably start tongues wagging."

and being comfortable with microphones and keeping your face relaxed when there's a photographer in front of you

MIKE: And knowing how to answer those questions that you can anticipate, that you don't want to answer.

ANN: But the comics pros that — you know, if I named names it would probably start tongues wagging — who *don't* make good public appearances, probably never will, because fundamentally they don't like doing it. It's real hard to get past that. If they do hundreds of appearances, they may get *used* to them, but they'll never be good at it.

MIKE: Let me give you a couple of rules. If you're advertised for a show, show up. When you do show up don't have the attitude that you're doing them a favor. You *might* be but it's a symbiotic relationship.

ANN: Because they are doing you a favor, as well.

MIKE: They're promoting your work. Even if you're the *hottest* thing in the world — hey, I said it a minute ago, we're in show business, and some of the best and biggest talents ten years ago, five years ago, can't sell a book today — they're helping you out just as much as you're helping them out. Enjoy what you're doing, as Ann said, but if you can't — I mean everybody has a bad day — realize that *you* are on stage, so you damn well better be pleasant and polite.

ANN: And it doesn't matter how you feel.

MIKE: Yeah, you gotta turn it on. Be succinct. You have to know how to handle fans who are going to ask you, for the 400th time what's going to happen in next month's issue, and you probably don't remember. Before you go into the convention look through your notes and see what is happening in next month's issue of the book you are working on so you *can* talk about it. .

ANN: Even if you *break* every single one of those rules but you still enjoy being there, then it will still be a success on some levels that count.

MIKE: Keep yourself accessible to the fans to the greatest extent that you can. Given the parameters at conventions, it's harder in Chicago or San Diego than it is in Kansas City or Indianapolis.

ANN: And if you're caught by fans in the elevator, well you better enjoy that, too.

MIKE: You know, don't be an asshole. *(Laughter.)* That's the most important thing.

ANN: And be prepared.

MIKE: No matter how badly you don't

"I think part of the anthology concept is to make a home

want to be there, maybe you've slept only two hours a night for three months, but you *committed* yourself to that convention. four months ago so, show up and don't be an asshole. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *The people who seem to come off the best on panels are the people who, not that they have to do homework, but they seem to come prepared to give instant answers about what's coming up*

MIKE: Right, they're excited

ANN: Those are the kind of people that even if they can't answer a particular question will still go the extra mile to make their "I don't know" amusing

MIKE: You can be provocative but you have to watch your act. **Max Collins** will throw a hand grenade out into the audience. He will go out there and say, "Geez, I don't know, I thought **Adam West** was great." And then he will throw himself on that hand grenade and smother the blast with his own body. That's great, that's terrific. You can't do it all of the time, but if you know when and how to use that particular stunt, that's fine.

PETER: *I have heard it said that one particular person went over well with fans because he argued with them; they liked it because he wasn't being personally insulting while doing it, and they felt that he was telling them what he felt, and that he would discuss these things with them.*

MIKE: Right. Anybody who pays their money and reads the book has a right to an opinion, and if you're going out there in public — nobody's drafting you, they're *asking* you — then you have to be responsive to that opinion. You have to have some sort of credential. I mean, if you used to be this great person in the comics field many years ago and you haven't done anything since, fine, those are your credentials. If you're highly opinionated and you have nothing really interesting to say about what's going on in the medium, and you haven't done anything at all, then you have no business being there, and unfortunately there are people who are like that.

PETER: *What's the biggest change the two of you would like to see made in conventions as they now exist?*

ANN: There's always something that you can do behind the scenes better, to get the people through the registration desks faster, to work with the hotel people, to set standards. I think also that the moderators of the panels ought to come better prepared pretty much across the board. It's the rare panel moderator that has enough innate ability — I think Michael does — to run a panel cold. The panel I ran on women in comics, I spent quite a few hours preparing for it and even then I thought it only came off all right. I see people up there who really have done no preparation. They sit there looking vacant trying to figure out what the next question is going to be, and they don't listen to the answers because they're too busy sweating it out.

PETER: *Let's put it this way. It seems to me that conventions are somewhat structured now, there will be all of the obvious panels, DC, Marvel, the usual suspects —*

MIKE: Right. It's very hard to change that because people really want to see that structure

ANN: That's right. You can try some of the more unusual stuff.

PETER: *Well, I guess that answers my question; but is there something else that you think should be going on?*

ANN: It's really difficult to give the fans more access to the professionals, which is what the fans really want. Maybe conventions could use some minor changes but I think they're doing *pretty* well

MIKE: Back around 1980 I was working on Chicago Comicon with Ann, we had a guest list of about 60 people, which was a pretty healthy number for that period. It wasn't until the direct-sales publishers started coming along that you started to get 120 guests at the Chicago Comicon. I was looking over those 60 guests and I thought that most *all* of them were pretty good — there were a few newcomers nobody knew about, but you should always have a few newcomers. But I got this idea that instead of keeping that huge show open to any guest that would come, *just* invite ten people because they're big names and they're good performers. Well, it was a wonderful fantasy.

The thing the promoters and the publishers who support those conventions tend to forget is that it is an entertainment experience. The promoters want to have the big names because they know they will draw, and their willing to make some trades; they'll take your three absolute unknowns that you want to get some exposure if you will provide them with one big name that will get some people in the front door. That's a good trade for

MR. TRACY?
"NOTHING" VONSON! I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD THIS PLACE. I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE YOU GOT OUT
I DON'T KNOW NOTHING.
SAME OLD "NOTHING." BIG WELL... SIT DOWN.
"NOTHING," YOU'VE GOT GOOD FOOD AND A NICE PLACE— BUSY, TOO.
WE'RE DOING VERY WELL.
IF YOU HAD A CUSTOMER THAT WEIGHED 462 POUNDS, WOULD YOU BE APT TO REMEMBER HIS NAME?
I DON'T REMEMBER NOTHING. ANYTHING ELSE I CAN DO FOR YOU?
YES, OUT ACTING LIKE A LITTLE PEANUT-STAND TOUGH AND CO-OPERATE WITH THE POLICE FOR A CHANGE.
I DON'T KNOW NOTHING.
Dick Tracy © 1964 The Chicago Tribune
Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Text written by Max Collins

Chester Gould's DICK TRACY, the detective's detective. (Reprinting of a 1935 strip.)

for certain characters. We're giving it our best shot."

everybody concerned. But if that one big name is only going to be on one panel over the course of the three-day show, and sitting in the artists room for one hour and maybe do an autograph thing for a half-hour somewhere else, and be surly to the fans — and I'm not talking about anybody in particular — keep him home. That's it. Don't bother flying him out, he's going to do more harm than good. People will walk away saying, "Gee, that guy was really an asshole."

ANN: And word gets around

MIKE: Right. The fans go back home to their local comic-book stores and say, "That guy was an asshole."

ANN: And they'll say that for *years!*

MIKE: And the kids behind the counter will repeat it, you know, "I hear that guy's a jerk." Terrible PR, don't do that. There is one type of person who doesn't fit into that category, the person who is obviously scared shitless. I can think of a dozen people but I'll only mention **Chester Gould** since he's dead. Chet was terrific, his work speaks for itself, he left a wonderful legacy; Chet was guest of honor one year at the Chicago Comicon, and he was getting along in years, he showed up one day out of the three and he was just awestruck! He couldn't believe that there were five thousand people who wanted his autograph, to ask him about DICK TRACY, talk to him about all of this stuff, talk to him about obscure plot points from something he did perhaps as far back as 1931 — he was absolutely astonished and he just *couldn't come back* for the last two days.

ANN: I've seen a couple of people burn out from the convention experience and I don't blame them for that. It's a very high intensity experience and if you are a shy person naturally, if you're not a performer and never will be —

MIKE: Well, I don't know about never will be, I think almost anybody can be trained to do that

ANN: If they want to. But the people who burn out the first time they go never wanted to to begin with.

MIKE: That's true. It's a real interesting experience. You've got to remember that it's a public thing for meeting people, and if you don't like the experience then you have to look at it from the perspective that you're selling the comic books

You go to the European stores and they don't have a DC section or a Marvel section or an Eclipse section or what have you, or even an alphabetical thing of all of the comic books — I mean they may in certain places — but what you're struck with in Europe is that you go to the *artist*, to the **Will Eisner** section, to the **Jack Kirby** section; it's like going to a record store where all of the records are there by the name of the performer.

ANN: That's *interesting*.

MIKE: Or the title or the character. They have a different legacy in terms of how the comic books are produced there. But if we are to be taken seriously we are ultimately going to be heading towards that type of environment. So if you are the latest guy to be doing SPIDER-MAN or BATMAN or what have you, what your goal *probably* is is to do something that you've created. You've got to take those conventions seriously. It's *literally* part of your career

PETER: *Well, you are now Director of Development at DC. How did this come about, what does this consist of, what kind of things are you looking to develop, and where do you see DC going in the next five or ten years?*

MIKE: Well, it's the same thing I've been doing since I came back to DC — it was nice they gave me the job title, it's really what I do. Initially it was to go and take some dormant property and make something more out of it, and then go into some unique areas like, "Let's rethink horror comics totally." I continue to approach those types of problems and that dominates my work day. ACTION COMICS WEEKLY is an attempt to find some way of doing anthology comics. If comic books are to be the showcase for talent and for characters — ultimately you want to do original graphic novels — then

Artist, George Freeman artwork for the cover of WASTELAND#1.

"There is no shortage of people who want to do comic books."

you have to have more than just monthly comic books, and you have to have places to experiment. If you think about it, almost *all* of the major Marvel superheroes, and *all* of the major DC superheroes, started out in anthology comics. Spider-Man, Thor, Iron Man, Captain America's revival, all started in anthology comics. The Hulk failed in its own comic book and only succeeded after years of being in an anthology title.

PETER: *About the only exceptions to that were Daredevil, teams like the X-MEN, and spin-offs, like the Silver Surfer getting his own book after being a character in THE FANTASTIC FOUR.*

MIKE: Right

PETER: *And you're talking about writers and artists, too, that they don't have to start out carrying a whole book by themselves?*

MIKE: Absolutely. But people want to have so much story weight in such a short period of time, as well they should, and that too is important. You just can't give them an 8-page or 10-page or 12-page story once a month like they did in the old days, so maybe we can do it on a weekly basis. I'm not sure, because we're also pretty deep in their pockets for ACW. We're giving them the equivalent of four graphic novels' worth of material for the *price* of one graphic novel, but we're asking for $1.50 every week. That's pretty deep.

ANN: Have you thought of doing a biweekly instead of a weekly?

MIKE: Yeah, Marvel's doing that, but they're doing it in a different way. In their biweekly the characters are there for one story and you may never see them again after the end of that storyline. I think part of the anthology concept is to make a home for certain characters. We're giving it our best shot, we're backing it with all of the promotion and marketing expertise at DC's command, there's some very very good talent in it, there's some very very good characters in it, there's some fairly experimental stuff in there, too — otherwise why bother doing it. We could always do a GREEN LANTERN comic or a BLACK CANARY comic or whatever, but maybe not a SECRET SIX.

If you have the job that I have, at DC or anywhere else — it really was essentially the job I had at First as well — you can only be most excited about *one* project at a time; BUGS BUNNY is it right now.

PETER: *What I've heard you say about BUGS BUNNY recently is that this is not a children's book in the sense of, say, the Star comics.*

MIKE: Well, I don't know. Most of the Star comics are TV tie-ins and BUGS BUNNY —

PETER: *Okay, let's say the Harvey comics.*

MIKE: BUGS BUNNY isn't a TV tie-in. If it was it would be a really lame book because on TV the cartoons are edited so severely. When we met with the Warners Brothers people — and mind you this is all in theory now, they still might not like the execution and that could torpedo the series — the Warners Brothers people understood the difference between what was in the movie theaters and what's on television. They understand that whereas we would like to appeal to a lot of younger readers by doing BUGS BUNNY, if we *only* appeal to young readers we'll be out of business. We have to appeal to our mainstay readers as well. If the 16-year-olds and the 20-year-olds and the 30-year-olds as *groups* don't like BUGS BUNNY, we're dead. If we only have the eight-year-olds then we're dead. They also understood when I said, "Our BUGS BUNNY's is a little bit more influenced by the **Bob Clampett** cartoons than by the **Chuck Jones** cartoons." The idea is to do BUGS BUNNY in a way that would be accessible to the youngest readers and also be totally entertaining to the average comic-book reader

PETER: *And originally the cartoons were done for audiences of all ages.*

MIKE: I don't see that in the Star comics, although at Harvey Comics it's very clear they really want to appeal to the youngest readers that are out there, and that's well and good. That's not really what we're talking about with BUGS BUNNY. Our first original project — we'll probably be putting out some reprints — but our first *original* project is a three-part BUGS BUNNY mini-series that is one continued story, not two or three stories each issue. Most of the classic Warners characters are there. It is very much a BUGS BUNNY story in that the theme is pivotal to Bugs Bunny, and of course Daffy is there quite a bit, and Elmer and Porky. But it's one story. The storyline is that Bugs is out of work and he can't understand why, even Daffy is getting a couple of movie cartoons these days; he's always been so successful, he's got his own star on Sunset Strip, and he's always been better than Daffy. It's not that he's *jealous* of Daffy, but you know Bugs Foghorn Leghorn has his own chain of fast food places; Tweety Bird is

Blackhawks from ACTION COMICS WEEKLY#617 (art by Burchett).

"I don't think that Marvel is being dominated by grim & gritty."

a disk jockey on BTV, the all bird watching network. Bugs can't understand why he's getting doors slammed in his face. Through the help of Daffy, who in the true spirit of the cartoons assumes various guises, including that of the Duck Knight Detective, they discover that Bugs is the victim of an international conspiracy. There is a big conglomerate that's buying up everything and *keeping* Bugs from being employed — Fudd Corp. *(Laughter.)* And we take it one step further, there's somebody behind Elmer Fudd.

PETER: *If I stop the tape will you tell me?*

MIKE: No! *(Laughter.)* Our comic-book series is very traditional to those cartoons, not to the BUGS BUNNY comic books. There were some good BUGS BUNNY comic books —

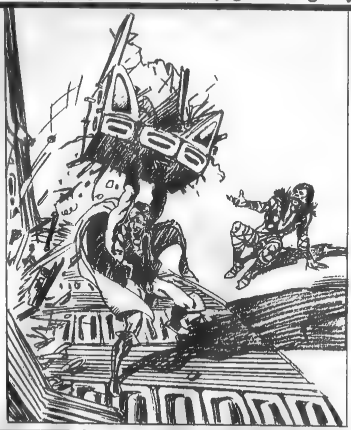
PETER: *But you're going for the essence of the cinema animation BUGS BUNNY rather than the outward trappings.*

MIKE: Right.

PETER: *But it's very definitely a product for the 1980s comics market.*

MIKE: That's right — to the extent that we're *successful.*

Joey Cavalieri is the writer, **Chuck Fiala** is the penciller, and **John Costanza** the inker. The script and sample pages of art



Pencils from one of Mike's early editing jobs. The art is by Frank Brunner, the book *was* WARP (from First Comics).

"I think Sgt. Rock is almost as important as Superman, Wonder Woman,

are in Warners' hands right now.

PETER: *And if it's a success will you be developing other books of the animated genre?*

MIKE: Of course, that's why we're doing this. There is no shortage of people who want to do these comic books, and very talented people, *quite* a few. So I hope it's as successful as it can possibly be. I hope it outsells THE X-MEN

PETER: *Another thing that struck me from the last interview – the mysterious last interview we keep referring to — is that you're working for diversification in the DC line*

MIKE: That's right.

PETER: *Among the major professionals there is a growing belief that the two major companies are being dominated by the so-called grim and gritty style of comic, and that creates a narrowing.*

MIKE: There are different ways of looking at it. I agree with *some* of that. I don't think that Marvel is being dominated by grim and gritty, though the X-MEN books tend to be, but, you know, maybe I'm just trapped by the Marvel image, which is not a grim and gritty image. When Marvel comics are done right by and large there's not much grim and gritty, the X-MEN group has its own sort of sub-image within that. DC certainly has its share of grim and gritty. SUPERMAN certainly isn't but BATMAN certainly is, and that's what Batman's all about. GREEN ARROW is in places, it isn't in some places. FLASH is just too wacky to be grim and gritty.

ANN: Well, if people want Archie comics, let 'em buy Archie comics.

MIKE: But there's a lot of diversification beyond just whether you're wacky or grim and gritty or traditionally heroic. You know, there are the general superhero books and there are *much* more eclectic superhero books like THE QUESTION or WATCHMEN. We're doing BUGS BUNNY. Then there's the horror stuff like WASTELAND and SWAMP THING and HELLBLAZER; I don't think you could call either of those latter two books hero oriented, they're *character* oriented.

There's war comics. Another project I'm working on is to keep the traditional war comic alive. We just cancelled SGT. ROCK, so now let's bring back SGT. ROCK and do it as a reprint books — it's just that simple, let's reprint those classic **Robert Kanigher/Joe Kubert** stories. Let's keep the door open to the traditional World War II comic. I think SGT. ROCK is almost as important as SUPERMAN, WONDER WOMAN, FLASH, BATMAN, and GREEN LANTERN. It deserves a continued place in DC's history. And we'll reprint some of the **Russ Heath** stories, which are *excellent*. We'll be showing some of the earlier work of **Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin, Walt Simonson, Neal Adams** and those guys. Let's see if we can keep that war genre alive.

PETER: *Since the revamping of the DC superheroes DC seems to have gotten more into licensed material: BUGS BUNNY, THE SHADOW, FLASH GORDON, THE PHANTOM, and DOC SAVAGE.*

MIKE: Right.

PETER: *What is the impetus behind this?*

and Green Lantern. It deserves a continued place in DC's history."

MIKE: Much of that really is out of a sense of tradition. I'm beginning to think we're doing too many mini-series, but that's just my own opinion. FLASH GORDON is a nine-part mini-series, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and in the first issue we did not show Flash Gordon being a natural born hero, we showed him being a natural born jock, so over the course of the next eight issues we show him growing into the role of *being* a hero.

PETER: *So it seems like some of what you're trying to accomplish is contemporary treatments of classic material?*

MIKE: Right. There's always ways of doing it, and if somebody has enthusiasm for doing it and there is a demand in the marketplace then we would consider it, but we wouldn't necessarily do it.

PETER: *Is there anything else you can talk about at this point in time?*

MIKE: Well, I'm working with **Mike Baron** on a new mini-series with a new character — the reason it's a mini-series is because of Mike's other obligations he can't do it as a regular series. But it's a great character, there's no reason to bury it until he can get to it. "Hell, no! We can do four parts now, let's do four parts now!" I've got four new Prestige Format series, none of which are really recreations — no, that's not true, *one* of them is, but I can't tell you what the character is or who's doing it. But I'm very excited about it. Those series are personality driven in terms of talent, which is I think the greatest success of that format. It's also the real failure of that format, too. You have a brilliant person who has a great idea and it might not work out. That's show biz. But more often than not it does work out.

We're also developing the TSR properties into comics forms: DRAGONLANCE, ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, GAMMARAUDERS and BUCK ROGERS.

That is an interesting challenge, turning role-playing games into comic book stores. Barbara Kesel and Brian Augustyn are the editors who'll have direct

"I go to comics conventions and stores and hear people talking

responsibility for those projects.

PETER: *Where do you think comics are going to be five years from now?*

ANN: Think carefully, what kind of portfolios do you want to see for the next five years at comic conventions? *(Laughter.)*

MIKE: I'll tell you where I see us going in five years. I see us sort of growing into two different I don't want to say industries because that sounds so noncreative, but let's call it creative industries. One of them is doing the mainstays, the monthly ongoing books, SUPERMAN, BATMAN, JUSTICE LEAGUE, FLASH, GREEN ARROW, WONDER WOMAN, whatever — the standard stuff, the standard characters, done as brilliantly as humanly possible by people who *love* those characters and want respect for those characters. You'll see a lot of new talent coming into that, but they still have to meet the same criteria, they have to be great and have exciting ideas. The second creative industry will be slightly apart from this one, sort of the graphic novel industry, if you will. There will be what's called Prestige Format books, the more traditional graphic novels, the larger size softcover books, the hardcover books, art books — there's not going to be any standard involved as far as format, there's *barely* a standard format today. Five years from now it will just be a bit more clear, you will see comic books that are printed on one form or another newsprint on a periodical basis, and you will see *books* and they'll be separate. And maybe — I'm not advocating this but it certainly is something that bears consideration — *maybe* what you'll see at DC and at Marvel and at Eclipse and at Dark Horse and at what have you are sort of two different companies within a company, one doing the periodicals and one doing the books, not a hardcover/softcover operation but two *different* media.

PETER: *So maybe in five years you will go into a Waldenbooks or whatever and see the comics section and it's* books, *Prestige Format, hardcover, trade paperback, whatever?*

MIKE: Right.

PETER: *They're there and they're going to stay on sale for a long time.*

MIKE: Hopefully, and they're judged by the same standards as the book publishing industry. If you sell 50,000 copies of a trade paperback in three or four weeks, you're doing phenomenally. If you're doing that in comic books you're not going to lose money, but no one's going to throw a party.

That's where I see things in five years. How do we get to that point? Well, by pretty much doing what we're doing now, but by kicking people in the ass and saying, "If you want to go and do this Prestige Format stuff, think about it this way, don't think about it that way, because thinking about it that way is how you've been doing regular comic books all of your life and this stuff is different." In the Prestige Format you have more intense stories, and yes, they have beginnings and middles and ends, and they're not paced like a typical comic-book story is paced, people have to walk away not with a sense of continuity but with a sense of *life*. Continuity is what happens in this month's issue of THE X-MEN and how it impacts on the other 17 X-MEN titles and on the rest of the Marvel Universe, and three years down the road this story will be an element. You don't look at a graphic novel with that broad a view, you look at it as a *specific* unit.

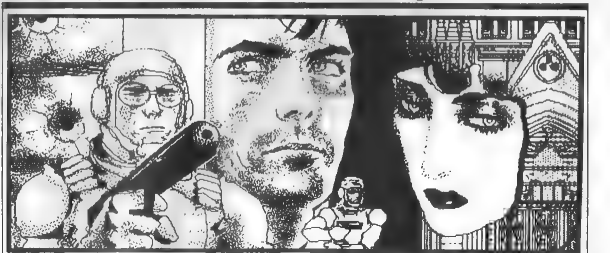
PETER: *Also in five years in terms of the content, they've been very successful in terms of drama, where do you see comedy?*

MIKE: JUSTICE LEAGUE has been very successful, GROO has been very successful, hopefully BUGS BUNNY will be as well.

PETER: *But where do you see the trade paperbacks and so on five years from now? Are they for the most part going to be all different genres? For instance you were talking about autobiography in comics earlier.*

MIKE: I'm working with **Mike Grell** about doing a Prestige series influenced by his family's history, and certainly **Artie**

about things that excite them, that's something I can take back."



Spiegelman has done that *brilliantly* with MAUS.

PETER: *So you're looking for diversification of material?*

MIKE: Absolutely.

PETER: *Are there particular types of material that you think will go over that perhaps we aren't seeing today, or possibly only hints of or exceptions?*

ANN: Maybe there will be material that will better reach women.

MIKE: I hope so. I don't think we can reach women in traditional comic books because we can't get them into the comic-book stores and almost no comics are sold outside of comic-book stores. Comic-book shops are very *male* places, they are decidedly male places, and many women who go into comic-book stores feel real creepy.

ANN: Well, you walk in and there are cheesecake posters and posters of guys with half their teeth knocked out and blood flowing down their face. This is not a place I relax in.

MIKE: I think we stand a much better chance of attracting women as readers if we get them when they're in the bookstores, and then get them going into the comic-book stores.

ANN: And it's a fallacy that only women can write for women.

MIKE: I agree. However, we have to make a more concerted effort to bring women creators into the medium no matter *who* their intended audience might be. We're beginning to see women writers and women artists in somewhat greater quantities today than we saw ten years ago because there are *some* comic books that have been somewhat accessible to women. Five years ago we started seeing a *noticeable* number of women at comics conventions — not a *staggering* number but at least a noticeable number. They are brought in as comic-book fans as men are brought in as comic-book fans, and today there are quite a number of women who are in management positions at publishing houses, almost all of the major publishing houses and most of the small ones. **Jenette Kahn** has been publisher at DC comics for twelve years, **Karen Berger** has been an editor eight years — the doors are open, the role models are beginning to be there, the accessibility is beginning to be there.

ANN: You're implying that as a result there will be an evolution of the product as well.

MIKE: That will be more accessible to women, yes, I hope so. But just as you say, you don't need women to write women characters.

ANN: And conversely I didn't see DC turning into a women's comics company overnight when Jenette took over.

MIKE: Absolutely true, but you did see certain experiments, ANGEL LOVE for example, which will continue to happen

There are also *technical* influences that we have to expand upon. There's this myth that after SHATTER nobody wanted to develop computer generation for comics, which is obviously not true. A lot of comics artist, **John Byrne, Jim Starlin, Bruce Patterson,** and **Pepe Moreno** have joined **Mike Saenz** — but now all of a sudden the technology has grown to the point where those techniques have faded into the background and you don't see them as obviously even though they are being employed. Right now we're at the edge of another breakthrough, we're opening ourselves up to all kinds of technological advances, particularly in coloring. Right now *today* with a computer you can have available 16.8 million colors, fabulous, all just beautiful, not flat although they can be flat if you want them. So we're on the verge of some real interesting technical breakthroughs that have not been used anywhere before, so that's nice; it's nice to be on the forefront. As Director of Development I'm *very* interested in that. We're working with **Pepe Moreno** on several projects right now. And that kind of development can open the doors to something totally new and different.

PETER: *It's been said of comics, mainstream comics particularly, that they tend to climb aboard the trend 20 years after it started.*

MIKE: You bet.

PETER: *Is this going to change?*

MIKE: It already has. We have to be more responsive — our readers demand it.

PETER: *Do you have any idea of what the next direction comics will take will be?*

MIKE: No, all I can do is work on different avenues with *some* perception of what people are talking about. I go to comics conventions and stores and hear people talking about things that excite them, that's something I can take back. We can go out there and do a comic book, even a four-part Prestige Format full-color series, in less time than it takes to do a movie. Instead of doing Kung Fu comic books three years after **Bruce Lee** dies, to posit an example, if somebody walks in saying, "Gee, I just saw these great Japanese movies, I want to go and do something like that in comics," we can sit down and immediately say, "That's interesting, what would you do?" And if there's an interesting answer to that, and if the person is talented and we know that person can pull it off, chances are extremely good that that we'll go out and do it. That's what we hope for every day.

LAST WORD

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DAK

MISTAKES ARE US

Dear David,

Thank you for a very interesting interview with **Steve** MacManus and **Alan McKenzie**. Equally interesting was the fact that you captioned a piece of **Liam Sharp**'s artwork with the words "Steve Dillon's signature is even stranger than his artwork"!

Steve Dillon
South Thames Studios
5-11 Lavington Street
London SE1 ONZ
UNITED KINGDOM

How about this: COMICS INTERVIEW's captions are even stranger than the interviews! Actually, we were just testing you to see if you were skipping the captions or reading every word — and you came through with flying colors. Liam, alas, failed. Sorry for any discomfort this may have caused either of you.

DAK

MORE MINI-ARTISTS!

Dear David A. Kraft,

COMICS INTERVIEW is one hell of a great book. As I believe someone mentioned, even someone I don't know or care about usually makes for interesting reading. If I have a complaint, it's that some interviews are a bit superficial, but hey, maybe the subjects are too???

Not surprisingly, I would like to see more mini-artists, "undergrounders" and alternatives represented. Did you ever think of running an interview with yourself?

And if you're looking for an alternative artist, well . . . aw shucks . . . okay, I'll do it. (Such modesty.) I knew **Frank Miller** in Montpelier and was the first in America to print **Brian Bolland** back in '72, so I have connections you wouldn't believe! All kidding aside, looking forward to the next 100 issues. Don't stop!!!

Al Greenier
65 Ingraham St.
Bristol, CT 06010

Many thanks for telling us how great COMICS INTERVIEW is (we need the occasional pat on the back), but — better yet — tell others how great we are! Pass the word to every retailer, every comics enthusiast that you know about the magnificent INTERVIEW magazine and together, we'll conquer the comics world! Speaking of together — let's get together and do that interview, Al!

DAK

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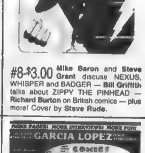

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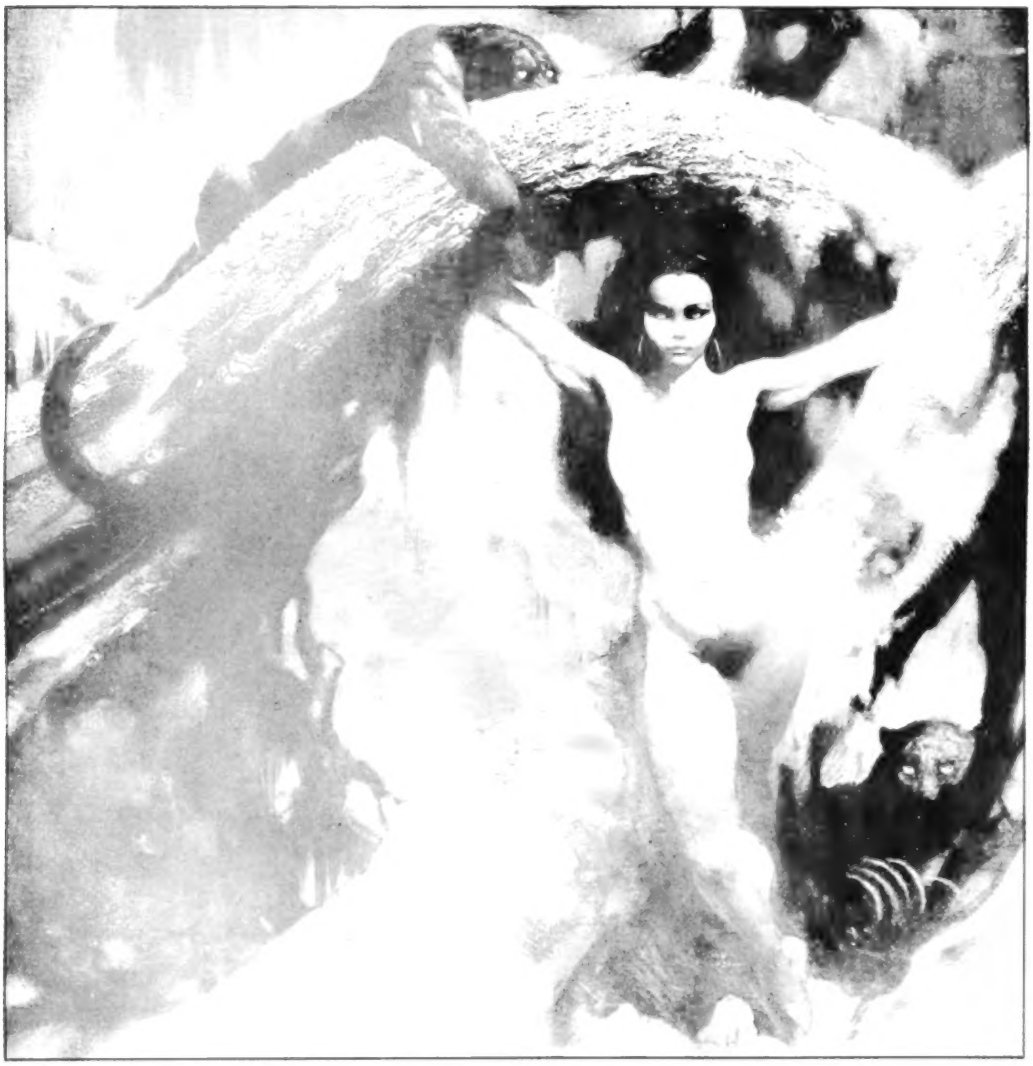

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